

**SPACE, MOVEMENT AND IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY BRITISH ASIAN
FICTION**

Értekezés a doktori (PhD) fokozat megszerzése érdekében
az **Irodalomtudományok** tudományágban

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Doktori (PhD) értekezés

**Space, Movement and Identity in
Contemporary British Asian Fiction**

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Debreceni Egyetem

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List of abbreviations

AM – Anita and Me

BA – The Black Album

BS – The Buddha of Suburbia

BL – Brick Lane

MLL – Maps for Lost Lovers

P - Psychoraag

T – Tourism

TGB – The Glassblower’s Breath

INTRODUCTION

Space, Movement and Identity

My dissertation addresses the issues of space, movement and identity and investigates the complex nature of their interconnectedness in contemporary British Asian diaspora fiction. Through the close reading of representative novels the chapters that follow will investigate issues like the mutually interdependent and transformative relationship between space and identity, the types of movements generated by space, and the influence movements have on space and the sense of place. Within the scope provided by the framework and the chosen corpus, I shall explore ways in which space and movement are affected by one's identity formation and, conversely, how identity is transformed (transfused, transmuted, metamorphosed) by and through various forms of movement in diverse spaces and places. I will look at how space, movement and identity become intertwined and inseparable within the context of British diasporic consciousness and subjectivity – all this in selected representatives of contemporary British Asian fiction: Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2004), Nadeem Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004), Nirpal Singh Dhaliwal's *Tourism* (2006), Sunetra Gupta's *The Glassblower's Breath* (1993), Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) and *The Black Album* (1995) and Meera Syal's *Anita and Me* (2004).

Although, due to what is often referred to as the 'spatial turn' in criticism, the interconnectedness of space, movement and identity has received a great deal of critical attention in the past two decades, the study of British diaspora literature has in general neglected this approach. There have been a number of references to space, movement and identity (either individually or in conjunction) in the critical work on contemporary British Asian fiction,¹ but a monographic treatment of their relations and interrelatedness has never been attempted. To remedy this lack, my dissertation first and foremost investigates the pivotal role of space *and* movement in identity formation and construction, identity performance and performativity, agency and subjectivity, as manifested and depicted in a selection of contemporary British Asian novels. The primary reason why my dissertation revolves around the notions of space, movement and identity is that they are the inseparable

¹ Examples include Mark Stein's *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation* (2004); Ruvani Ranasinha's *South Asian Writers in Twentieth-century Britain: Culture in Translation* (2007); and *British Asian Fiction: Framing the Contemporary* (2008), edited by Neil Murphy and Wai-chew Sim.

core elements of diasporic existence, and human existence itself, for that matter. Furthermore, I believe that investigating the complex interrelationships of these concepts in British Asian diaspora fiction may in fact enable and contribute to a better understanding of the fundamentally social phenomenon and issue of diaspora and diasporisation in today's globalised world.

The comparative analysis of seven novels is obviously not sufficient to provide a comprehensive account and complete picture of the whole of British Asian diaspora fiction, nor is it aiming to offer generalised statements about or case studies of the interrelatedness of space, movement and identity. Instead, my choice of novels adopts a roughly chronological pattern, following the past three decades of the evolution of British Asian fiction from post-colonial to post-postcolonial and post-ethnic, from male-oriented to gender-inflected, providing new perspectives on frequently analysed novels (e.g. the cultural aspects of spatiality and the spatial aspects of identity) and calling attention to works hitherto more or less neglected by critics. Furthermore, although these novels all feature prevalent tropes of diaspora fiction, I approach these tropes from different angles (such as cultural positioning and gender) that reveal further layers for possible interpretations. By doing so, my aim is to emphasise the diverse perspectives and cultural insights of British Asian authors and their works that both represent newly emerging identities in British cultural space and shed light on dimensions remaining hidden in dominant discourses, thereby enabling and initiating new arguments about the interrelatedness of space, movement and identity.

The first argument of the dissertation is already obvious from the decision to narrow the focus of my investigation to British Asian diaspora literature rather than looking at the entirety of British diaspora literature (that is, the literature of the various diasporas living in Britain, such as British Caribbeans and British Chinese): I argue that there exist certain recurrent patterns in this body of fiction – such as the portrayal of the hybridization of identity and space, of identity crisis, cultural positioning and identity performance, and various forms of mental and physical movement – and one major aim of the dissertation is to map these patterns. On the other hand, the relatively narrow focus enables me to explore differences within the community. Thus, my second argument is that the spatial configuration of diasporic identity even within a relatively clearly defined community like that of the British Asian diaspora is far from homogeneous, and that the dissimilarities depending on differences of gender, class, age and physical location can be best grasped through a treatment of the relationship between spatiality and subjectivity. Furthermore, in my view, different spaces

and locations not only define identity but also serve as triggers for movement, journeys of discovery of a fluid identity, enabling subjects to play upon and with the multiplicity of their identities in a continuing act of identity performance. I shall assert that while what I call *locational mimicry*² is frequently seen as a source or symptom of disempowerment, rootlessness or non-attachment, it can also be understood – as in Homi Bhabha’s theory – as a conscious strategy of identity performance. Finally, the main argument that informs my dissertation is that a thorough exploration of literary representations of diasporic identity is possible only through the combination of various approaches to spatiality: in general terms, what we might call the phenomenological situatedness or facticity of the subject is inseparable from the subject’s position and movement in cultural spaces.

The core of the theoretical background of my investigations and arguments is situated at the intersection of cultural, postcolonial and diaspora studies. My general approach is primarily inspired by cultural studies, drawing upon the critical insights of theorists such as Homi K. Bhabha (1994) and Stuart Hall (1996) on cultural identity, ethnicity and in-betweenness,³ and particularly on their respective theories of hybridity, which I find particularly useful and essential for the study of cultural identity in British Asian diaspora fiction. In biology, hybridity is defined as the mixture of two species, while from a cultural aspect it is often understood as the fusion of cultures and identities (Cf. R. Young, *Colonial Desire*) in a process of hybridization,⁴ which Kobena Mercer (1988, 1994) refers to as cultural creolisation. Salman Rushdie interprets hybridity as a transfusion of cultural identities, calling for a celebration of “hybridity, impurity, intermingling” (*Imaginary Homelands* 394), which he refers to as “mongrelization” (*Imaginary Homelands* 395)⁵ and “cross-pollination” (*Imaginary Homelands* 20). His notion not only points back to the biological definition of hybridity but also emphasises the doubled, mutual process of hybridization that takes place in contemporary cultures and results in a “new cultural hybridity in Britain, a transmutation of British culture into a compounded, composite mode” (R. Young, *Colonial Desire* 22). When

² For an elaborate explanation of my concept see chapter 2.

³ Although the term is widely used in theories of cultural identity both with and without a hyphen, I shall henceforth use *in-betweenness*, as I believe the hyphen expresses the essence of the term. Any cases of *inbetweenness* in quotations in this text signal the authors’ choice.

⁴ In the theoretical corpus I have studied, the notion appears with two different spellings: *hybridisation* and *hybridization*. My choice of the spelling *hybridization* (and *hybridize*) here, and throughout the dissertation, points to Bhabha’s usage of the term.

⁵ While both hybridity and mongrelisation have negative connotations denoting impurity, the former is gradually gaining a positive meaning. What makes Rushdie’s position so remarkable is that he highlights the celebratory aspect of hybridity, which is well visible in his assertion that *The Satanic Verses* “rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the Pure” (*Imaginary Homelands* 394).

perceived as the interaction and combination of cultures, hybridity comes to be seen as a third entity, a new joint identity that scholars like Stuart Hall tend to advocate.

Hall links his theory of hybridity to what he calls “new ethnicities” (Cf. Hall, 1992), a concept which recognises one’s cultural roots but calls for an interpretation of ethnicity relating both to the homeland *and* the host culture, i.e., he asserts the cultural identity of the once ‘black British subject’ – now ‘new ethnicity’ – as necessarily hybrid. For Hall the term ‘black,’ as a political category,⁶ provided a joint politics of resistance (“New Ethnicities” 252), and signalled homogenization, diasporisation and, eventually, hybridization. Reflecting on Hall’s and Mercer’s theories, Robert Young points out that hybridity “works simultaneously in two ways: ‘organically’, hegemonizing, creating new spaces, structures, scenes, and ‘intentionally’, diasporizing, intervening as a form of subversion, translation, transformation” (*Colonial Desire* 23). What Young’s words imply is that hybridization may not only be interpreted as fusion but also as “raceless chaos” which does not create a stable new form but a Bhabhaian “restless, uneasy, interstitial hybridity: a radical heterogeneity, discontinuity, the permanent revolution of forms” (*Colonial Desire* 23-24).

Bhabha defines hybridity as “a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other ‘denied’ knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority” (*Location* 114). For him, hybridity is, then, not a special condition of certain communities and individuals that deserves to be celebrated rather than denigrated but “the everyday” itself, involving “moments of clash, of polarization, and of stasis” (Huddart 95),⁷ i.e., hybridity is defined by him as a constant contestation, a reversal, a “process of translating and transvaluing cultural differences” (Bhabha, *Location* 252), as well as a “partializing process” (*Location* 115), both generated by and accompanying the “traumatic encounters” of intersubjectivity (Cf. Bényei, 2011). The notion of colonial hybridity is intertwined with the

⁶ Throughout the post-colonial decade, the different African, Asian and Caribbean immigrant groups were perceived as one homogeneous inferior minority in Britain, labelled ‘black’ from the 1970s on, which was, in Mercer’s words, more of a “political, rather than a racial category” (*Welcome* 29). The use of the term ‘black’ lasted from the 1970s until 1988, when the Commission for Racial equality proposed the terms British Caribbean and British Asian to replace the “counter-politics of racial solidarity” with “one of ethnic pluralism” (Ticktin 66).

⁷ In fact, Bhabha indirectly opposes the celebratory position of Rushdie’s novel when he makes the following claim: “In my writing, I’ve been arguing against the multiculturalist notion that you can put together harmoniously any number of cultures in a pretty mosaic. You cannot just solder together different cultural traditions to produce some brave new cultural totality. The current phase of economic and social history makes you aware of cultural difference *not* at the celebratory level of diversity but always at the point of conflict or crisis. (“Art” 82). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is likewise critical of the celebration of hybridity when she refers to “the postmodern postcolonialist” as “the triumphalist self-declared hybrid” (*Critique* 361).

concept of mimicry (a concept I shall return to later): Bhabha claims that hybridity is a “camouflage,” “a contesting, antagonistic agency” (*Location* 193), which, through the colonised subject’s partial, imperfect mimicry, becomes a “paranoid,” “uncontainable” threat, since it “breaks down the symmetry and duality of self/other, inside/outside” (*Location* 116). As a subversive form of counterauthority, hybridity for Bhabha becomes a “third space” of the “in-between” (*Location* 38) – not the kind of joint entity that Hall proposes, but a liminal third term, the metaphor not of sameness, but of cultural difference, “a metonymy of presence” (*Location* 115). The concept of third space enables Bhabha to make direct links between colonial and post-colonial hybridity, and between the hybrid nature of colonial and contemporary culture, a correlation he explains in an interview as follows:

[F]or me the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the ‘third space’ which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom. (“The Third Space” 211)

What Bhabha’s words imply is that hybridity is not the result of the intermingling of two ‘pure’ positions or entities but “the contaminated yet connective tissue between cultures” (“Culture’s” 54), a kind of boundary with a spatial and temporal liminality (Cf. Huddart 4-5), while the ongoing process of hybridity and the “borderland of ‘hybridization’” (“On Minorities” 4-5) create both migratory, “partial” cultures or what he refers to as “culture’s ‘in-between’” (“Culture’s” 54), and in-between and partial identities. Such an identity necessarily entails difference, which Tamás Bényei explains the following way: “Rather than resting on identity or identicalness, colonial identity is constructed through difference, through the permanent differentiation and shaping of differences” (*Traumatikus* 164).⁸

The notion of hybridity – portrayed in my fictional corpus both as something to be celebrated and as “the everyday,” as Hall’s “new ethnicity” and a Bhabhaian liminal third space – will appear as the primary recurring trope throughout my dissertation, as I concentrate on the ongoing interconnections and mutual implicatedness of subjectivity and space, starting with a broadly phenomenological conception of this relationship and superimposing on it a detailed reading of the cultural aspects of spatiality. Lining up with Huddart’s conclusive claim that cultural hybridity is by no means general but may manifest itself in diverse forms

⁸ The translation is provided by Tamás Bényei (“Re: fejezet”).

and situations (84), I aim to explore the differences within, and possible variations on, the hybrid cultural identities of British Asians – most apparent in the use of Hinglish,⁹ the hybrid language of most of the novels analysed here – as well as the liminality and in-betweenness of diasporic subjects.

The issue of identity – at least as regards diaspora literature – has been predominantly approached and analysed from the aspect of cultural and generational differences and, until James Procter's *Dwelling Places: Postwar Black British Writing* (2003), not much attention was paid to its interconnectedness with the settings of the diaspora novels as geographical locations, or to the literary representations of the British Asian diaspora outside the capital. Although, as Procter claims, London “persists as the cultural capital of black Britain” (*Dwelling Places* 164), it certainly does not serve as the ultimate or exclusive location for the portrayal of black and Asian cultures and the interaction between space and identity formation. In fact, the widespread idea of the English countryside as a nostalgic refuge of uncontaminated and unadulterated Englishness is often challenged and contradicted in diaspora fiction: following the footsteps of Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987), an increasing number of diaspora novels depict the country as the main location of the diaspora experience.¹⁰ What these novels indicate is that while the British Asian diaspora is generally characterised by nostalgia towards their home country and culture, their cultural practices also redefine and transform British/English cultural spaces and the notion of Britishness and Englishness,¹¹ that is, their very presence in ‘English territory’ racialises ‘the nation’ and its landscapes. According to Procter, “in a whole range of narratives concerning ‘race’ ... the black body and the built landscape share a common location that is at once fixed, neutralised and non-negotiable,” and such a logic “fails to acknowledge the presence of an increasing

⁹ Hinglish denotes the hybridization of the English language by blending it with Urdu, Hindi and Punjabi, and is increasingly visible in contemporary British Asian fiction and poetry, such as Gautam Malkani's *Londonstani* (2006) and Daljit Nagra's collection of poetry *Look We Have Coming to Dover!* (2007). For insightful studies of this trend, see Mahal (2006), and Kothari and Snell (2011).

¹⁰ See, for instance, Zahid Hussain's Manchester-based novel, *The Curry Mile* (2006), Saumya Balsari's *The Cambridge Curry Club* (2008), Suhayl Saadi's Glasgow novel, *Psychoraag* (2004), Amit Chaudhuri's *Afternoon Raag* (1993), depicting student life in Oxford, and Niven Govinden's *Graffiti My Soul* (2006), set in Surrey, as well as Nadeem Aslam's and Meera Syal's novels, discussed in chapter 1.

¹¹ Here (and throughout my dissertation) I shall make a distinction between Britishness and Englishness, as well as British and English cultural space. While Englishness has traditionally been associated with the English countryside as a cultural space and therefore has nostalgic connotations such as rustic, ‘real’ and domestic, ‘British’ is a more formal, political category, denoting the expansion of the nation-state. According to Raphael Samuel, the term ‘British’ “allows for a more pluralistic understanding of the nation, one which sees it as a citizenry rather than a folk. It does not presuppose a common culture and it is therefore more hospitable both to newcomers and outsiders” (1989b: xii–xiii). What Samuel's assertion implies is that, as opposed to the allegedly mono-cultural ‘white’ space of the English countryside, urban or metropolitan space as ‘British’ is by implication necessarily multiethnic and multicultural. For the literary representations of this distinction see chapters 1 and 2.

regional, locally accented black British literature in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries outside London and beyond the urban” (*Dwelling Places* 164). Consequently, the countryside as a possible diasporic location and the “spatial mythology” of the north/south divide (Cf. Shields 62) do not enter black British discourse, and “provincial” black and Asian experiences are largely overlooked or excluded.

In *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (1987) Paul Gilroy asserts the association between identity and location, and claims that “regional or local subjectivities simply do not articulate with ‘race’ in quite the same way as their national equivalent” (54). Although Gilroy does not specify the *modus operandi* of this articulation, he does recognise the possibilities of regional subjectivity, and thus acknowledges the fact that black Britain is made up of a culturally varied landscape and is marked by local and regional differences. Drawing on Procter’s and Gilroy’s respective claims, my dissertation aims to shed light on the literary representations of regional diasporic identities and of the provincial landscapes of the north as well, since, in Procter’s words, “such localities share a complex attachment to black diasporic formations, transnational trajectories and travels” (*Dwelling Places* 165), and indisputably indicate that it is not only the capital, but also “England that is *itself* deeply racialized” (*Dwelling Places* 166). Therefore, the novels analysed in this dissertation were selected with this geographical and regional diversity in mind, with the aim of providing a more complex picture of British Asian cultural production, and of how regional identities transform the traditional English cultural-symbolic meanings of space, creating postcolonial-diasporic spaces.

My dissertation also wishes to acknowledge other internal differences and rifts within ‘British Asian’ diasporic identity. While in the 1990s the critical emphasis was put on the works of established male writers such as V. S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie, women writers of the diaspora were greatly marginalized and it was only from the turn of the century that the scope of academic interest was widened to include ‘less prominent’ male and female writers of the diaspora (Cf. Bentley, 2005; English 101-20; Innes, 2008). Yasmin Hussain’s *Writing Diaspora* (2005), for example, is an excellent study of South Asian women from a literary, cultural and ethnic perspective, while *Multi-ethnic Britain 2000+* (2008), edited by Lars Eckstein et al., and Sara Upstone’s *British Asian Fiction* (2010) were pioneering studies introducing new perspectives. Taking its cue from their work, my dissertation aims to extend their insights, also focusing on twenty-first century representations as well as emphasizing the gender aspect of British Asian subjectivity: the gendered nature of diasporic experiences (Cf.

Clifford, *Routes* 258), “gendered social locations” (Smith and Katz 75), and what Adrienne Rich has termed “the politics of location” (Cf. Rich, 1986), *loci* which the female characters of the novels analysed may speak from.

In *Space, Place and Gender* (1994) Doreen Massey emphasises the intersections and mutual construction of space/place and gender, and claims that “the limitation on mobility in space, the attempted consignment/confinement to particular places on the one hand, and the limitation on identity on the other - have been crucially related (*Space* 179). My close reading of British Asian women’s diasporic fiction investigates the nature of this relation and the female protagonists’ different ways of transgression,¹² of challenging or overcoming these limitations via movement in order to establish a form of female agency and a gendered diasporic subjectivity. I am also particularly interested in mapping representations of alternative diasporic subjectivities, or in other words, a “post-postcolonial”¹³ subjectivity which Upstone refers to as a “post-ethnic reality” (*British Asian* 211) in contemporary diaspora fiction.

My dissertation enters the critical debate at a moment in which space and movement are becoming significant aspects of analysis in books like Sara Upstone’s *Spatial Politics in the Postcolonial Novel* (2009), Roger Bromley’s *Narratives for a New Belonging: Diasporic Cultural Fictions* (2000), and *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*, edited by Sara Ahmed et al. (2003). Their analyses predominantly focus on movement as the synonym of migration, and on space in terms of a concomitant displacement, deterritorialization, and the formation of diasporic communities (Cf. Bromley 8), of belonging¹⁴ and cultural identity, hybridity and in-betweenness. As I see it, such focal points indicate that these studies remain within the context and confines of cultural and diaspora studies, neglecting immigrants’ movement and trajectories in the host country, and failing to

¹² Throughout my dissertation I use the term transgression on one hand to denote the crossing of borders and boundaries both literally (through movement) and metaphorically (as a subversive act breaking cultural, religious and ethical rules), and, on the other hand, as the spatial and behavioural manifestation of transgressive desire. For the most influential theories of transgression and transgressive desire see Freud (1908), Bataille (1962), Foucault (1977) and Lacan (1992).

¹³ My understanding of “post-postcolonial” may be best explained by Homi Bhabha’s claims about the prefix ‘post’: “If the jargon of our times – postmodernity, postcoloniality, postfeminism – has any meaning at all, it does not lie in the popular use of the ‘post’ to indicate sequentiality – *after*-feminism; or polarity – *anti*-modernism. These terms that insistently gesture to the beyond only embody this restless and revisionary energy if they transform the present into an expanded and ex-centric site of experience and empowerment” (*Location* 6) [original emphasis]. The post-postcolonial, as I see it in the context of British Asian subjectivity, denotes a restless move beyond the post-colonial and is both revisionary and unconcerned. For a further explanation, see chapter 2.

¹⁴ By belonging I mean both a way of (spatial) self-identification and, in line with Debra Ferreday’s interpretation, “a sense of shared imaginary possessions or ‘belongings’” (29).

tackle the role of space, place and location in identity formation and performativity in the context of human geography, sociology or other disciplines studying such phenomena.

My work places a special emphasis on providing a new interdisciplinary perspective and introduces a complex theoretical-critical approach that has not been applied to the study of this particular field yet. Besides cultural, postcolonial and diaspora studies, the second theoretical base of my dissertation is provided by various theories of space and spatiality. Since the advent of the spatial turn, space has become one of the most frequently invoked themes and critical tropes in recent criticism of ethnic and minority literatures. One obvious reason for this critical popularity is that a spatial approach, enabling us to address literary renderings of experiences of dislocation and belonging, in-betweenness and hybridity, seems particularly relevant in an analysis of migrant and immigrant experience. I shall argue that the spatialization of immigrant experience in diasporic fiction may provide further examples of, and variations on, how space is produced and appropriated, and how spacial practices transform space into place, one cultural space into another – mono-cultural space into a bi-, multicultural or diasporic hybrid space. What David Harvey calls the “*appropriation* and use of space for individual and social purposes” (*Urban* 177) is a crucial and also thematically central element in British Asian diaspora fiction, thus I believe that the analysis of this corpus demands a spatial approach and a thorough understanding of the various processes of spatialization.

Henri Lefebvre (1974) and David Harvey (1990), among others, emphasise the importance of lived practices and spatializations with regards to the production of space (Cf. Massey, *Space* 251), while Michel de Certeau (1988) stresses the interconnectedness of movement and space, defining the latter as a heterogeneous location of migration and mobility, an “effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programmes or contractual proximities” (117). Hence, I argue, every diasporic novel depicting immigrant experience is what de Certeau refers to as a “spatial story,” which “constantly transforms places into spaces or spaces into places” (118) and which invites an investigation of spatial practices in their various forms – especially travelling and walking, the primary forms of movement in the novels analysed here. For de Certeau, the act of walking is a reinscription of city space (and, in my understanding, of any space for that matter), which may result in the reorganisation of space (Cf. “Walking in the City” 117-19) in order “to take over the city, to claim it in the image of one’s own story, one’s own unique tour through its spaces” (Clement Ball,

Imagining London 13), until the city and its proper names “become liberated spaces that can be occupied” (de Certeau 105). Such a deeply personal relationship and lived experience result in the transformation of static places into fluid “lived spaces” (de Certeau 96), and point towards the phenomenological perception of space and place – the main focus of my analysis of spatiality in diaspora fiction and diasporic subjectivity.

In *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), Maurice Merleau-Ponty explained that phenomenology is “a philosophy which puts essences back into existence, and does not expect to arrive at an understanding of man and the world from any starting point other than that of their ‘facticity’” (vi). While in Jean-Paul Sartre’s existential philosophy the notion of facticity is a dimension of human existence, made up of diverse facts about the subject,¹⁵ from a phenomenological point of view, facticity first and foremost has spatial connotations – it refers to the fact that the subject is born in and finds himself/herself in certain spaces, that is, it denotes the subject’s actual ways of being in the world. The concept of facticity is also closely related to Martin Heidegger’s notion of “worlding,” understood both as spaciousness and as a new way of “Being-in-the world,” the basic state of *Dasein* (*Being and Time* 80).

In the process of worlding, space and identity are mutually constructive. Gaston Bachelard’s influential *The Poetics of Space* (1958) describes this phenomenon through the metaphor of the house and the body, when he claims that that houses “live on in us” (56), that is, they influence perception of space through experience and memories. Merleau-Ponty also approaches space from the aspect of experience, asserting that the body is the subject of space, directly connected with the world through perception and spatial experience. For Bachelard it is this relationship that brings “inhabited space” into being, which not only “transcends geometrical space” (47) but also “bears the essence of the notion of home” (5).¹⁶ As a place of subjectivity and an intimate space, the house/home may be perceived both as a facticity and as an indisputable factor in the process of worlding – as a reference point for individuals to find a place in the world. It is the phenomenological understanding of spatiality and emplacement that I draw on in investigating the portrayal of spaces and places (including the home) in my fictional corpus in order to map the diasporic subject’s being in the world in

¹⁵ As Taylor Carman explains, “[m]y facticity is that set of past and present facts about my body, my behavior, my character, and my social and physical situation, as they present themselves to a third-person point of view” (236). For Sartre’s concept of facticity see his *Being and Nothingness* (1943).

¹⁶ For an elaborate account of Bachelard’s and Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological theories, as well as of the history of subjectivity, space and the place-world see Edward S. Casey’s *The Fate of Place* (1997) and *Getting Back into Place* (1993).

the process of identity formation and construction, as well as the role of movement in creating this worlding and emplacement.

Bachelard and Merleau-Ponty also emphasise the importance of movement in the bodily perception and experience of space, and make their respective claims about the simultaneously spatial and temporal nature of movement, which has a profound influence on the moving body, and by extension, on subjectivity as well (Cf. Merleau-Ponty 267-75). It is these critical positions that most interest me and have inspired me to apply the perspectives of spatiality and movement in an investigation of the literary representations of British-Asian immigrant and diasporic experience, since I believe that such an approach facilitates a better understanding of the shift from Salman Rushdie's (1992) "imaginary homelands" to Zadie Smith's "Happy Multicultural Land" (465), from cultural purity to an "everyday hybridity" (Moss),¹⁷ from the immigrant to a diasporian and to a hybrid subjectivity that Hanif Kureishi calls "a new way of being British" (*My Beautiful Laundrette* 18).

The spatiality of diasporic experience is perhaps most notably apparent in Avtar Brah's (1996) notion of diaspora space, defined as follows:

Diaspora space is the intersectionality of diaspora, border, and dis/location as point of confluence of economic, political, cultural, and psychic processes. It is where multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed, and disavowed; where the permitted and the prohibited perpetually interrogate; and where the accepted and the transgressive imperceptibly mingle even while these syncretic forms may be disclaimed in the name of purity and tradition. (208)

Characterised by intersectionality and confluence, diaspora space is a complex concept, encompassing various aspects of space, movement and identity. First, it is a site that is perpetually shifting and changing, i.e., it is in constant movement, thereby metaphorising the diaspora subject's physical and emotional journeys between the homeland and the host country (Brah 182). It is also a space where "the native is as much a diasporian as the diasporian is the native" (Brah 209); so, for Brah, England itself becomes a diaspora space where various diasporas "intersect among themselves as well as with the entity constructed as 'Englishness', thoroughly re-inscribing it in the process" (209). Brah's assertion calls attention to the transformations and hybridization of both space and identity, and posits

¹⁷ Moss applies the term in connection with Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2001) to denote the "normalisation of hybridity in contemporary postcolonial communities" (12).

diaspora space as the spatial metaphor of hybridity *par excellence*, which for me is also strongly linked to Homi Bhabha's theory of third space (Cf. *Location*, especially 36-9). Although Bhabha's notion is first and foremost applied with regard to colonialism, it is also highly relevant in the postcolonial era, in the spatial representations of immigrant/diasporic experience, since the space these subjects inhabit is a "split-space of enunciation," an "in-between space" between national borders and cultures, which "carries the burden of the meaning of culture" (*Location* 38), yet, at the same time, has the potential to foster the "inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity" (*Location* 38) [original emphasis]. Drawing upon Bhabha's and Brah's concepts, and in line with Jopi Nyman, who views diaspora space as "a liminal space of identity ... where various transnational forces, both local and global, remould identity" (22), in my dissertation I use the terms diaspora and diaspora space both in its particularity and as a theoretical term, denoting a third space, which is hybrid and hybridizing, and spatially, as the primary *locus* of processes of diasporic identity formation.

For Nyman, diasporic identity is necessarily a hybridized identity, and as such it is a "space of in-betweenness where the diasporic subject reconstructs itself, problematising the issues of home, belonging, and nation" (22). In a similar way, Igor Maver claims that "living in a diasporic space essentially signifies the forging of a new identity and a new diasporic, hybrid subjectivity" (x). This process of identity formation is inflected, facilitated and accelerated not only by the interaction and tension between diaspora space and multicultural urban space but, as I shall claim, also by liminal suburban space and the countryside, home to various South Asian diasporic communities. By no means wishing to contradict interpretations of diaspora space as fluid and borderless, I shall argue that diaspora space may be both confining, i.e., restricting or fixing the diaspora subject in a location, situation or identity, and liberating, which may be best approached from the concept of open space, a spatial metaphor itself, applicable to diaspora space and multicultural urban space alike. While, according to urban-sociological definitions, open space is an undeveloped or wide-open area (Cf. Woolley, 2003), I use the concept both in the sense of Edward Soja's notion of "Thirdspace," which he defines as "a limitless composition of lifeworlds that are radically open and openly radicalizable" (70), that is, as a liberating space of freedom, potential and agency, and also as de Certeau's practiced lived space of the hybrid(ized) diasporian.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of space in terms of diasporic identity is that the diasporic subjects' presence, practices and movement in space (whether confining or open)

are indisputably intertwined with their confusion of cultural identity and feeling of in-betweenness. What I am chiefly interested in here is how the in-between state of the diaspora is projected onto space, and how their identity formation is in turn influenced by the in-betweenness of space (i.e., third space and diaspora space). I shall argue that, despite the hybridity and interpenetration of space and identity, several diasporic characters of the novels discussed in this dissertation give up the desire to belong and to be seen settled in a fixed identity, while others – whether deliberately or unwillingly – search for alternative ways of being and belonging. Either way, their desires and quests manifest, or result in, various forms of movement, as well as of self-positioning, mimicry and identity performance.

When I claim that the discussed novels and their protagonists ‘position themselves,’ I primarily draw on Stuart Hall’s assertion that cultural identity is “[n]ot an essence but a *positioning*” (“A Place” 395) [original emphasis]. In an interview with Morley and Chen, Hall explains his viewpoint the following way:

I think cultural identity is not fixed, it’s always hybrid. But this is precisely because it comes out of very specific historical formations, out of very specific histories and cultural repertoires of enunciation, that it can constitute a ‘positionality’, which we call, provisionally, identity. It’s not just anything. So each of those life stories is inscribed in the positions we take up and identify with, and we have to live this ensemble of identity-positions in all its specificities” (504).

The positions Hall refers to may, in my view, be approached from the aspect of culture (e.g. South Asian, diasporian or British), geography (i.e., a character’s identity positioned as Indian, Pakistani and English etc.), location (for example suburban, regional or a Londoner), community (being an insider or an outsider), and even the degree of one’s attachment to space and place (leading to self identification and positioning as e.g. a local or a tourist). My approach to positionality is also inspired by Steve Pile’s claims that “the self is always located within a situation” and that this situation is always “profoundly geographical” (54), that is, one’s geographical location and social situation are concomitant with one’s cultural and personal self-positioning. Such a positioning in space, as Elizabeth Grosz argues, “gives the subject a coherent identity and ability to manipulate things, including its own body parts, in space” (*Space* 92), while the positioning of identity, a recurring trope of my dissertation which I refer to henceforth as *identity positions*, may mark various stages in the process of a diaspora subject’s identity formation, or, in Stuart Hall’s words, “points of temporary

attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us” (“Introduction” 5).

From the aspect of human geography, these identity positions may also be interpreted as roles (or, I should say, role-plays), which add a further layer to the understanding of the interconnectedness of space and identity. Andrew Sayer explains this relationship between the subject and space (and society) as follows: “[W]hat you are depends not just on what you have, together with how you conceive yourself, but on how others relate to you, on what they understand you to be and themselves to be” (211); therefore, “to a considerable extent people have to adopt meanings, roles and identities which pre-exist them” (213). Returning to the findings of cultural studies, these adopted roles and identities may point to Joan Riviere’s (1929) gendered concept of the masquerade¹⁸ and Bhabha’s notion of colonial mimicry which “repeats rather than re-presents” (*Location* 88) [original emphasis], that is, which takes the form of imitation and repetition, and thereby becomes “a mask, a mockery” (*Location* 120).¹⁹

Inspired by V. S. Naipaul’s *The Mimic Men* (1967), Bhabha’s “mimic man” (*Location* 69) is characterised by “an exaggerated copying of language, culture, manners, and ideas” and his mimicry is always a “partial representation” (*Location* 88), i.e., “a flawed colonial mimesis” (*Location* 87), a “repetition with difference,” mocking “the ongoing pretensions of colonialism and empire” (Huddart 39). According to Bhabha, “colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a *subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference” (*Location* 86) [original emphasis]. Bhabha’s mimicry works on two (correlative) levels: first, it emerges as a representational strategy of colonial authority that creates mimicry subjects,²⁰ natives that have taken on elements of English cultural identity in order to ‘look’ and sound English but who are nevertheless perceived by Bhabha as the embodiment of flawed colonial mimesis. On the second level this flawed, partial representation may become a successful strategy of resistance when colonial agency is ‘activated,’ that is, at the point where repetition

¹⁸ In Riviere’s theory, for some women womanliness is a mere mask put on to avert anxiety and retribution (see for example Nazneen’s exaggerated role as a perfect housewife in chapter 3), as well as to hide their phallic rivalry and hatred of men (91). What I find most useful about Riviere’s concept is her emphasis on ‘the mask’ as a tool of both mimicry and deceit to justify one’s identity position.

¹⁹ Female masquerade and mimicry are in fact similar in their relationship to identity, since, as Peggy Phelan, notes, both are “attempts to reproduce what is not there” (68).

²⁰ I shall examine the figure of the *babu* as a mimicry subject in chapter 3.

turns into mockery, and mimetic assimilation into a subversive act. Mimicry thus becomes, in Bhabha's words, "at once resemblance and menace" (*Location* 86).²¹

While in terms of colonialism the ambivalence of Bhabhaian mimicry indicates a split between the colonizer and the colonized, and may undermine colonial discourse, applied to the postcolonial situation, it is first and foremost understood as a strategy of the immigrant's to fit in the host country and its culture; it is, as mentioned before, a camouflage, which denotes "blending in with something in the background that none the less is not entirely there itself" (Huddart 46) and which also evokes Roger Caillois's (1936) work on psychastenia, in which mimicry is responsible for the self's assimilation to space. If and when perceived as a tool for survival, mimicry is rarely portrayed as a threat or as a subversive act.²² In some of the novels I analyse, though, it undoubtedly manifests itself as a form of resistance – by appearing "more British than the British,"²³ the immigrant may make "the British feel not quite British, alienated from what they must believe is their true identity" (Huddart 44). As Huddart contends in his study of Bhabha, in mimicry identity "operates through metonymy," since it is "never identical with itself" (44). In analysing the characters' roles and role-plays throughout my dissertation, I shall rely on various theories of mimicry, but first and foremost on Bhabha's notion of mimicry as imperfect copying, a repetition without understanding, a partial representation of a desired identity, that is, in my view, a mask worn during a 'theatrical' performance of an identity other than one's own, or of merely one aspect or trait of a complex and multiple identity.

In performance theory, performance is defined as "an executed copy of an original that does not exist;" it "remakes and unmakes mimesis" and is an "embodied act, in specific sites, witnessed by others (and/or the watching self)" (Roach 457). For Judith Butler, "performance as bounded 'act' is distinguished from performativity insofar as the latter consists in a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer ... what is 'performed' works to conceal, if not disavow, what remains opaque, unconscious, unperformable" (*Bodies* 178). Butler's theory of performativity is influenced by and based on the performative theory of language, according to which performative acts are "forms of

²¹ See Tamás Bényei's *Traumatikus találkozások* (2011) for a comprehensive critical analysis of theories of mimicry, and particularly Bhabhaian mimicry.

²² The various aspects of Bhabhaian mimicry and their implication in postcolonial fiction are exemplified in Karim's figure in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, discussed in chapter 2.

²³ See, for example, Meena's mother in Syal's *Anita and Me* (chapter 1), Magid in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, who, although sent back to Bangladesh for years to learn the culture, returns to London "more English than the English" (307); and most notably Saladin Chamcha in *The Satanic Verses*.

authoritative speech,” “statements that, in the uttering, also perform a certain action and exercise a binding power” (*Bodies* 171). The performativity of identity is not a set of reiterations or “simply replicas of the same,” but a “repetition” (*Bodies* 172) and a “citationality” (*Bodies* 176), through which gender emerges “as a kind of reification of social norms about difference, a consequence of repeated performative enactments of male and female conventions in a given society” (Minca and Oakes 9). As Anne-Marie Fortier asserts, citing Butler, “[c]onceiving identity as performative means that identities are constructed by the ‘very “expressions” that are said to be [their] results’ (Butler, 1990:45)” (*Migrant* 6). In the following chapters I shall draw on Butler’s concept of performativity, both in terms of its implications for a gendered subjectivity, and in relation to the diasporic subject’s performance of cultural identity.

Drawing on Dwight Conquergood’s comparative analysis of theories of performance, Norman Denzin (2007) provides the following list of the various interpretations and understandings of the concept: performance as imitation, dramaturgical staging or *mimesis*; as liminality and construction or *poiesis*; and as “struggle, as an intervention, as breaking and remaking, ... as a socio-political act” or *kinesis*, i.e., motion or movement (Cf. Denzin 135). As Denzin claims, “[v]iewed as struggles and interventions, performances and performance events become transgressive achievements” (135), while as cultural practices, they “reaffirm, resist, transgress ... repressive understandings that circulate in daily life” (136).²⁴

It is due to these interpretations that I see performance as indirectly related to Butler’s radical understanding of gender as a performativity and Bhabha’s notion of mimicry as a form of resistance, in a way all subversive acts in their own rights. Generally speaking, however, performances do differ from performativity, inasmuch as the latter foregrounds performative acts (Cf. Butler, 1988) and utterances, while the former denotes forms of behavior which are “repeated, reinstated, or rehearsed for the purpose of being shown” (Roach 457-8). As Joseph Roach concludes, “[w]ith performance, the performer makes the acts, with performativity, the acts make the performer” (457). Drawing on the above theories and concepts, throughout my dissertation I use the term *identity performance* as a kind of “social display” (Roach 458) at the intersection of (or shifting to and fro between) performance (role-play) and Butlerian performativity (a construction and a display of [a gendered] cultural identity), with the diasporian being both the subject and the agent of his or her own performative actions.

²⁴ This claim is underlined by Karim’s theatrical performance of his identity with ‘a twist’, as I shall argue in chapter 2.

Proceeding from Conquergood's concept of performance as motion (31) and linking the notion of identity positions to theories of movement, my dissertation examines how performances, self-positioning and various forms of movement generate and facilitate identity formation from performative behaviour, i.e., how diasporic subjects "play" their identities, "heightening their constructed identity, performing slightly or radically different selves in different situations' (Schechner 361), to what Kathy E. Ferguson (1993) calls "mobile subjectivities,"²⁵ a term I borrow and apply to encompass *flâneurs*, tourists, travellers, cosmopolites and nomads as varieties of (post-)post-colonial subject positions. In reading and analysing the trajectories and journeys of the characters in cultural and social, mental and physical spaces (including urban, suburban and rural spaces, diaspora space and transnational spaces, private and domestic space), I use an interdisciplinary theoretical background, relying on diverse theories of movement. The first part of this theoretical input includes anthropological approaches to travelling and tourism: Michel de Certeau's work on travel as a "spatial practice" (115) and a way of uprooting (107), James Clifford's notion of "dwelling-in-travel" (*Routes* 3), as well as John Urry's (1990; 1995) theories on tourism, the tourist subject and the tourist gaze. Secondly, I shall make use of cultural theory's treatments of travelling and migration: Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) nomadology as a movement of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, and Rosi Braidotti's (1994) concept of the female nomad. Investigating the act of walking in urban space, I shall draw upon Walter Benjamin's (1972) idea of the *flâneur/flâneuse*, primarily as it has received gendered inflections in the work of theorists like Deborah L. Parsons (2003), Elizabeth Wilson (2001) and Janet Wolff (1990).

The application of these theoretical approaches will be based on the close reading of the selected novels, discussing relevant features of their narrative structure, as well as their recurring and individual motifs and tropes. The individual chapters of my dissertation highlight diverse aspects of my general claims and reveal the multiple ways in which space, movement and identity correlate in diasporic subjectivity and diaspora fiction. The title of each chapter is a quotation borrowed from one of the novels analysed – a keyword or a motto, if you like, introducing and incorporating the most important aspects of my investigations and arguments and corresponding directly to the titular notions of my dissertation, that is, they

²⁵ Ferguson coins the term 'mobile subjectivities' for her theory of the post-modern subject, and explains her choice of words as follows: "I have chosen the term *mobile* rather than *multiple* to avoid the implication of movement from one to another stable resting place' (158) [original emphasis].

serve as *leitmotifs* of both diaspora literature and diasporic subjectivity, characterised by transformation, movement/fluidity and positionality.

Chapter 1, “All these metamorphoses,” examines the various ways of the (trans-) formation and construction of identity and space: it revisits the frequently studied tropes and themes of diaspora fiction and interprets them through the close reading of *Maps for Lost Lovers*, *Anita and Me* and Kureishi’s *The Black Album*, focusing primarily on the novels’ portrayal of the transformations of space and self in the English countryside and the capital. The chapter introduces the recurring theoretical notions of diaspora space, belonging, hybridization, mapping, mimicry, performativity, identity performance and identity positions, and maps individual variations on these notions as portrayed in the protagonists’ identity crises, and alternative ways of belonging and identity construction. In chapter 2, “Any kind of movement,” I investigate movement in its diverse forms and in relation to identity formation and construction in the multicultural metropolis. Here, my main focus is on the second-generation immigrants’ mimicry, performances and identity positions in the urban space of London as depicted in *The Buddha of Suburbia* and Dhaliwal’s *Tourism*, and in comparison to relevant parts of Kureishi’s *The Black Album*. Throughout my analysis, I put an extra emphasis on examining the protagonists’ (as mobile subjectivities) journeys and routes in and between urban and suburban spaces, as well as their transnational travels, mapping their trajectories and territories through, and in, which they position and construct themselves as *flâneurs*, tourists and nomads. The final chapter, “A long way from home,” applies a gender perspective to the study of the diasporic novel, with a special emphasis on female agency in relation to the home and the city as places of belonging and spaces generating movement. I read Gupta’s *The Glassblower’s Breath* in search of its representation of diasporians as traveller selves and cosmopolites in a complex mental and physical relationship with cities, and Ali’s debut novel, *Brick Lane*, for its portrayal of the position and consciousness of diaspora women in London. In doing so, I shall both point back to the critical tropes of chapter 1, thereby ‘framing’ the insights of my dissertation, and, investigating the role of fate and urban space in the creation of female agency, I shall argue for the possibility of a female diasporic subjectivity in the open space of the emancipatory city, manifested in the figure of the female nomad, which metaphorises the “open ending” of both identity formation and its critical analysis.

Although not directly indicated, my dissertation may be divided in two ways. The first way concerns the representation of identity in the novels analysed: in the first part (chapter 1)

I read the literary representations of diasporic identity and introduce the key concepts and prevalent tropes in diasporic fiction. The second part (chapter 2) investigates novels that call attention to alternative takes on these tropes and diasporic subjectivity itself (such as belonging in movement), while in the third part (chapter 3) I focus on the gender aspect of British Asian diaspora fiction, reading two novels by women writers, and examining the identity formation of their female protagonists. What the latter two parts have in common is that here I primarily map the creation and performance of mobile subjectivities in perpetual movement and constant interaction with fluid spaces.

The second possible way of looking at the chapter division may be based on the novels' representation of the cultural and geographical spaces of Britain and the regional identities of diaspora subjects. From this aspect, the first half of my dissertation deals predominantly with novels written in and portraying the country outside the capital (*Maps for Lost Lovers* and *Anita and Me*, as well as some parts of *The Black Album* and *Tourism*), while the second part focuses on divergent contemporary literary representations of London. Set in London (and partly also its suburbs), the novels I analyse here (*The Black Album*, *The Buddha of Suburbia*, *Tourism*, *Brick Lane* and *The Glassblower's Breath*) enable the examination of multicultural urban space in relation to identity formation and performance. My main argument here is that urban and suburban spaces may serve both as confining factors and as motors for movement and transgression, and thereby become significant *loci* of liberation and emancipation, detachment and non-attachment, and what Elspeth Probyn calls "belonging in constant movement" and "modes of belonging as surface shifts" (19).²⁶ In their literary representations, these spaces become the nomadic territories of mobile subjectivities, just as Britain itself, to repeat and paraphrase Brah, becomes a multicultural, lived diaspora space appropriated, practiced and travelled by the members of various diasporas called the British.

²⁶ Probyn draws on Deleuze's nomadic approach to movement and becoming, and describes her theory of belonging as "a heightened sensitivity to the sensibilities, to being captured by the manners of being and desires for becoming-other" (5).

Chapter 1

“All these metamorphoses”

Transformations of Identity and Space in the Diasporic Novel

In the opening pages of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988), the two protagonists, Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha fall out of an exploded plane above the English Channel, and in the metamorphic transitory zone of the air they transmute into “Gibreelsaladin Farishtachamcha” (5), a hybrid entity *par excellence*. Their metamorphosis is perhaps one of the most well known metaphors of the immigrant experience and consciousness; it is a metaphor that appears in many a diaspora novel as a key concept and recurring trope. From the point of view of diasporic experience, this fluidity and the transformation it entails point to “the idea of mutation existing on a continuum between the extremes of cultural purity and hybridity” (Cundy 68), where hybridity is the end of the immigrant's journey and mutation. The metamorphosis of the self in Rushdie's novel takes place in the ‘illusory, discontinuous, metamorphic’ (Rushdie, *Satanic* 5) zone of the air, which, in my view, is the metaphor of diaspora space, the spatial projection of diasporic subjectivity.

The present chapter reads the literary representations of metamorphosis in three diaspora novels, Nadeem Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004), Meera Syal's *Anita and Me* (2004), and Hanif Kureishi's *The Black Album* (1995), in an attempt to identify and analyse the various forms of metamorphosis – not only of the self (diasporic identity) but also of space (English cultural and diaspora space) and of the sense of belonging. In doing so, I shall also study the treatment of the most common tropes in diaspora fiction, such as immigration and settlement, dislocation and reterritorialization, homing desire and the wish to belong, the crisis of cultural identity and identity formation, mimicry and performance, cultural purity and hybridity, which provide the thematic framework of the novels analysed here. Some of these tropes appear consistently in the three novels, while others emerge in various alternative forms thus lending themselves to different ways of interpretation. The reason for this diversity may be explained by the main differences between the novels' settings, as well as their focus on the different generations of diaspora subjects: while Aslam's novel predominantly depicts first generation immigrants, Syal's and Kureishi's protagonists are second generation

diasporians. As for their geographical settings, *The Black Album* is set in two main locations, suburban Kent (depicted through the hero's recollections) and the multicultural urban space of London; in contrast, *Maps for Lost Lovers* portrays a northern town with its main focus on an immigrant neighbourhood, whereas *Anita and Me* takes place exclusively in rural space, in a fictional bi-cultural village in the North of England. The diverse settings of these novels, in my view, may serve as spatial metaphors of the diversity of British Asian cultural production, and indicate a 'spatial turn' from the prevalence of London as a diasporic literary setting to the acknowledgement and representation of "an increasing regional, locally accented black British literature in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries outside London and beyond the urban" (Procter, *Dwelling Places* 164).

A regional British Asian literature intertwines with the regional and local subjectivities that Paul Gilroy (1987) calls attention to (such as "Geordie," "Hinnie," "Brummie" or "Scouse") – they become racialised in multiple ways with the appearance and growing visibility of, for example, black Brummies or Asian Scouses. The new accents and dialects of these hybrid subjectivities are also acknowledged, represented and voiced in contemporary diaspora writing (see also Karim's cockney in *The Buddha of Suburbia* or Meena's Brummie in *Anita and Me*) and thus mark "a much wider proliferation of regional dialects within 'everyday' black culture" (Procter, *Dwelling Places* 166). As a result, these novels portray the British Asian diaspora experience neither as "a local, 'English' experience" (Procter, *Dwelling Places* 166), as hegemonic dominant discourse on diaspora claims, nor as a common, so to say universalised, diaspora experience that the "'English' English accent" (Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands* 18) spoken by cosmopolitan writers such as Salman Rushdie suggests.

By both exemplifying regional British Asian diaspora fiction and redefining English cultural spaces and topographies, the three novels analysed in this chapter challenge the hegemonic discourses on black Britain and thus call for a reconsideration of both the image of the diaspora and the notion of Englishness.²⁷ Investigating transformations of space from the

²⁷ The 1981 British Nationality Act gave way to a dual understanding of national identity, separating Englishness from Britishness, distinguishing between a "unique, local, differentiated" English space and a more encompassing, "homogeneous, interchangeable" (Baucom 10) and multicultural British space. Thus, while urban areas have become the very sites of Britishness, the countryside has continued to be seen as the "epitome of a certain kind of Englishness" (Kumar 229), preserving the 'whiteness' and 'purity' of national identity. In *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire, and the Locations of Identity* Baucom provides an elaborate study of this duality of English national identity, i.e. the dichotomy of Englishness/Britishness, and suggests that one of the subversive effects of the presence of immigrants in the English countryside is that it consistently reminds the English of British identity thus creating a paradox with the notion of Englishness and a fear of the 'contamination' of its

perspectives of cultural, communal and individual identity as depicted in these novels, I argue that by the different levels and modes of interaction with English space, diaspora spaces may generate a sense of belonging and, quite contradictorily, also what Simone Weil calls rootlessness,²⁸ a lack of collective identity, and may also catalyse movement and the formation of hybrid subjectivities in an in-between space, as well as of multiple identity positions and alternative ways of belonging.

Maps for Lost Lovers

Although Aslam's novel was published after 9/11, much of the critical reception focuses on the novel's Orientalism and portrayal of British Muslim identity, fundamentalism and terror.²⁹ The following analysis also reflects on Muslim religious and cultural identity, but it does so from the aspect of space and spacial practices. Aslam's novel provides us an insight into the condition of working-class British Muslims, alienated and segregated in their exclusive immigrant neighbourhood.³⁰ Through the story of the honour killing of Jugnu and Chanda, and the focal points of Shamas, Kaukab, and their children, Aslam draws attention to the fact that, despite the shared immigrant experience, the British Asian diaspora in England is pulled apart by religious and cultural differences and thus deprives itself of a sense of community and belonging. The novel suggests that orthodox Islam creates a rift in the unity of the community, and also isolates it physically and culturally from the cultural space of the unnamed (and imaginary) northern town.

My reading aims at mapping how, despite its isolation, the community and the space it inhabits attempts but fails to avoid a certain degree of interaction with English culture and cultural space – the borders between the two spaces are permeable and ever shifting, there are 'intrusions' from both sides, as well as (un)conscious attempts to transform the places and

alleged purity – the *loci* of English identity then become, in Baucom's words, "spaces of instability in the geographies of Englishness" (4).

²⁸ Weil's concept of rootlessness marks the decline of a political spirit; it is a so-called *déracinement*. Based on Thucydides' idea of stasis, the concept also refers to the loss of a collective communal spirit, that is, the loss of a common past and common ancestors (see Dietz 154).

²⁹ See for example Butt (2008), Moore (2009), Upstone (2010) and Gunnig (2010).

³⁰ Although *Maps* is not an autobiographical novel, it may be worth taking a brief look at Aslam's cultural position in correlation with that of his characters. Aslam was born in Pakistan (into a non-religious family with a Communist father) and moved to Huddersfield, England at the age of fourteen. Although practically he is a first-generation immigrant – hence his self-identification as "a Pakistani man living in Britain" (qtd. in Upstone, *British Asian* 101) –, he was brought up and educated in Britain. His portrayal of a Muslim community, including devout Muslims and atheists, 'true' Pakistanis and hybrids, may, then, come from both personal and second-hand experiences, and offers a complex picture of the Pakistani Muslim diaspora.

spaces to their liking. What I am chiefly interested in here is Aslam's portrayal of transformations in the English cultural and geographical landscape and in the cultural identity of its inhabitants, i.e. the metamorphoses of identity and space: the creation of diaspora space, and the concomitant hybridization of identities and cultural space.

Dislocation, reterritorialization and isolation

Aslam's multifocal narration – an intermittent, alternate focalization on the main characters – creates an “open perspective structure” (Weingarten 4) in *Maps*, where the characters' different views on the events of the narrative reveal their individual attitudes to identity, culture, religion, diaspora and space, while also exposing the underlying patterns of a universal(ised) diaspora experience – the loss of the homeland and the unavoidable feeling of unbelonging and loneliness in an alien land, described as follows:

Pakistan is a poor country, a harsh and disastrously unjust land, its history a book of sad stories, and life is a trial if not a punishment for most of the people born there: millions of its sons and daughters have managed to find footholds all around the globe in their search for livelihood and a semblance of dignity. Roaming the planet looking for solace, they've settled in small towns that make them feel smaller still, and in cities that have tall buildings and even taller loneliness. (*MLL* 9)

Living at a place where the mosque stands side by side with a parish church and where each phone-call from “say, Norway, from a person who was from the same village as him in Pakistan” (*MLL* 9) is a constant reminder of a lost home and sense of belonging, the immigrants' consciousness is characterised by repeated moments of awakening to the fact that, although one is part of a global network of worldwide diasporas, part of a community and culture, one will forever feel the loneliness and uprootedness of a scattered people – isolated, unbelonging, displaced. The general description of diaspora experience as displacement entails a sense of placelessness³¹ or “‘unhomeliness’ which can be defined as the obscure feelings that simultaneously draw and repel a person in her relations to a place” (Leon 15).

³¹ The idea of placelessness was originally employed in architecture and cognitive mapping, by Kevin Lynch (1960) and Frederic Jameson (1988, 1991) to describe the postmodern condition of late capitalism. Here I use the term for the diasporic condition to denote what Carol E. Leon refers to as “a loss of place or context” (3) or Pile as being “out of place” (6), that is, being displaced or misplaced.

In Aslam's portrayal, on arriving in England in the 1970s, the characters of *Maps* "had to live *somewhere* and were moving in next door to the whites" (*MLL* 11) [original emphasis] to a boarding house which was not a place they could call or feel their own, only "a temporary accommodation in a country never thought of as home – the period in England was the equivalent of earthly suffering, the return one day to Pakistan entry to Paradise" (*MLL* 96). As a result, the diasporic community tried to create a sense of belonging by renaming places "to give the map of this English town a semblance of belonging" (*MLL*, 156):

As in Lahore, a road in this town is named after Goethe. There is a Park Street here as in Calcutta, a Malabar Hill as in Bombay, and a Naag Tolla Hill as in Dhaka. Because it was difficult to pronounce the English names, the men who arrived in this town in the 1950s had re-christened everything they saw before them ... over the decades, as more and more people came, the various nationalities of the subcontinent have changed the names according to the specific country they themselves are from ... Only one name has been accepted by every group, remaining unchanged. It's the name of the town itself. Dasht-e-Tanhaii.

The Wilderness of Solitude.

The Desert of Loneliness. (*MLL* 28-9)

Aslam's description of 'some' English town invites multiple interpretations. First, it may be viewed as a reversed process of colonisation and "the reverse appropriation of social space" (Weingarten 5), which familiarises the place for the immigrant with its subcontinental references and at the same time makes it the universal, timeless, neutral *locus* of the immigrant experience, a "nameless and shapeless place" where the community is "at once in England and not yet there" (O'Connor).

Furthermore, the allegorical Arabic name of the town stands for a barren, unhomey, meaningless land, where the slightest sense of belonging may only be achieved through renaming, a 'spatial strategy' (Cf. Gregory 168-73) that may be interpreted as a simultaneous "dispossession" and "writing a new land in one's own image" (Clement Ball, "Semi-detached" 13). On the other hand, Dasht-e-Tanhaii is also a *defamiliarised*, alienating place for the English readers: the renamed places and streets trigger the previously unlikely association of the nameless English town with named towns in the subcontinent and constantly remind the English of how the presence of immigrants disrupts the image of the

idyllic, pure countryside,³² believed to be characterised by intact communities, a sense of community, safety and security, neighbourliness, open spaces, privacy and solitude, reaffirming Englishness, cultural security, and timelessness (Neal 5, Table 1.1). The diasporic community (and Aslam’s portrayal of them) subverts dominant discourses on the English countryside and confronts the English (reader) with the reality of an all-encompassing Englishness and the irreversibility of spatial and social change.

The renaming and re-appropriation of space also suggests the possibility of interpreting both immigration and the creation of diaspora as a result of deterritorialization and, as compensations for the lost homeland, the reterritorialization of the place. In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari coined the two terms as part of their theory of nomadology, which for Caren Kaplan “signifies the importance of modes of displacement” (87) and the constitution of territory through movement – thus they are applicable to the study of migration and immigration as well. Employed in diaspora studies (not entirely in the spirit of Deleuze and Guattari³³), deterritorialization and reterritorialization denote the loss of an old territory (in the homeland) and taking possession of a new one (in the host country). Virinder Kalra, Raminder Kaur and John Hutnyk view this process in the following way: “Deterritorialization implies staking identity outside ordinary claims to the land ... Many diasporic groups can be called deterritorialized because their collective claims to an identity do not depend on residence on a particular plot of land” (32). Far from their country of origin, in a land that “isn’t our country” (*MLL* 79), the South Asian community of Dasht-e-Tanhaii lays claim to its cultural identity perhaps even more persistently and emphatically than it would back in the homeland.

³² As it is also suggested in the novel, the reaction to such disruption is often manifested in denial and exclusion. According to Sarah Neal, dominant discourses of the English countryside have “obscured the heterogeneity of rural populations and rural experiences,” and strove to “marginalize, invisibilise and subordinate those populations and issues” that did not sustain the “representation of the countryside as a ‘white space,’” as “picturesque, unchanging sites of social order and deference, of community sameness and familiarity” (20). One of the main merits of *Maps* is its attempt to shed light on this phenomenon and to draw attention to the presence and situation of diaspora communities outside the capital.

³³ For Deleuze and Guattari, deterritorialization originally designates the reversal of Lacanian territorialisation and, from a social aspect, the freeing of labour power from specific means of production, while reterritorialization is the re-attachment to new ways of production. They also use the two terms in reference to their theory of nomadology, where “D [deterritorialization] is the movement by which ‘one’ leaves the territory. It is the operation of the line of flight ... D may be overlaid by a compensatory reterritorialization obstructing the line of flight” (508). Deleuze and Guattari also warn us that reterritorialization “must not be confused with a return to a primitive or older territoriality: it necessarily implies a set of artifices by which one element, itself deterritorialized, serves as a new territoriality for another, which has lost its territoriality as well” (174).

In her account of Deleuze and Guattari's theory, Kaplan notes that deterritorialization "stresses the freedom of disconnection and the pleasures of interstitial subjectivity" (89). For the economic immigrants in *Maps*, freedom may be found in financial opportunities in England; however, it entails more danger and pain than pleasure, given the perceived risk of losing their culture and compromising their religious beliefs. What follows is that while deterritorialization may be perceived as a breaking out of the symbolic order,³⁴ in a way a subversive action, reterritorialization here may not only imply a new territoriality, but also a process of reversal, a return to this symbolic order, since the immigrants yearn for roots, stability, a certain symbolic identity – their existence thus entails a complex form of de- and reterritorialization in a sense that is slightly different from Deleuze and Guattari's concept. Their rootlessness in England is not the symptom of deterritorialization in a Deleuzian sense,³⁵ but an indicator of an attempt "to unsettle and unpack the problems associated with having multiple belongings or no sense of belonging at all" (Kalra et al. 4), and of their failed attempts at achieving reterritorialization and a fixed place/identity they associate with it. Therefore, their deterritorialization does not primarily concern space or place, but involves the deterritorialization of identity, which Robin Cohen explains as a phenomenon of the postmodern world: "[I]dentities have become deterritorialized and constructed and deconstructed in a flexible and situational way" (2). Deterritorialization is thence a spatial metaphor of identity formation despite one's wish for a fixed identity.

In an effort to preserve their roots, the deterritorialized, or, more precisely, deracinated immigrants strive to transform or even counter-colonize the English space they inhabit, "amassing a claim on the place bit by bit" (*MLL*, 156). This brings us back to Deleuze and Guattari again – as Kaplan asserts, "[t]he movement of deterritorialization *colonizes*, appropriates, even raids *other spaces* ... Deterritorialization is always reterritorialization, an increase of territory, an imperialization" (89) [original emphasis]. As Deleuze and Guattari point out, "[a]nything can serve as a reterritorialization, in other words, 'stand for' the lost territory; one can reterritorialize on a being, an object, a book, an apparatus or system" (508). By renaming, the South Asian diaspora community in the novel first and foremost reterritorializes on certain places (the neighbourhood), then eventually the English cultural space of the town itself, thus proclaiming their temporary attachment to a place they do not really belong to, taking possession of a space that they refuse to be possessed by. Apart from

³⁴ See Lacan (1977).

³⁵ Deterritorialization *par excellence* may be achieved by a self-conscious uprooting and nomadic subjectivity, which, I shall argue, can be found in Puppy's figure in *Tourism* (chapter 3).

renaming, the mosques and Hindu temples, the religious and cultural events held in the neighbourhood, as well as the businesses selling goods from the subcontinent are also important modes of reterritorialization; these are not only signs of the immigrants' inability to secede from the homeland, but also attempts at creating a certain sense of belonging in the host country by surrounding themselves with familiar sights, smells and sounds.

Just as the community reterritorializes the unnamed town and creates the metamorphosed cultural space of Dasht-e-Tanhaii, the narrator reterritorializes English cultural space through his description. He depicts a northern town with its centre on top of a hill, while the immigrant neighbourhood lies in the valley connected to the centre by a forest, a lake and a river – a piece of countryside both surrounding and within the town. It is this rural space where most of the novel takes place, a natural environment which Aslam fills with trees and other plants, footpaths and lawns, lights and shades, colours and fragrances, described in a poetic language full of metaphors and metonymies, such as “the blue and white forest of the sky” (*MLL* 162) and “below-zero monsoon” (*MLL* 8). As the first step of reterritorialization, Aslam defamiliarises urban space by focusing on the natural environment and the landscape itself, the parks and fields in the city and at its outskirts, representing the immigrant neighbourhood within the town as a rural space. Aslam's portrayal creates the sense of “a pastoral scene” (Chambers 180): the immigrants' dwelling space appears as a village made up of small houses with fruit- and flower-laden gardens at “the base of a hill” (*MLL* 3), providing slopes for the children in winter, and covered in “the abundant dropped fruit of wild cherry trees” (*MLL* 3) in summer. The neighbourhood is depicted as also including a riverbank, where “in early summer the reeds and flag irises stick out of the water” (*MLL* 17), a “surrounding countryside” (*MLL* 17), where the children collect moths; and, on the way to the city centre, a forest and a lake as well. After the defamiliarisation of urban space, Aslam empties this imaginary pastoral, rural space of its traditional (and idealised) cultural meaning by depicting the everyday life and practices of the diaspora community and fills this empty space with exotic South Asian imagery, such as “crystals of snow transformed into a monsoon raindrop” (*MLL* 5) and “the breeze dense with rosehips and ripening limes” (*MLL* 11). The novel mentions a wide variety of South-Asian plants and animals in Dasht-e-Tanhaii, for example tamarind trees, mangoes, sugarcane in the immigrants' gardens and local shops, as well as fireflies, peacocks (in Jugnu and Chanda's house) and subcontinental rose-ringed parakeets, roaming free and “causing havoc in the gardens and orchards on the outskirts of the town” (*MLL* 167).

The use of peacocks and moths is of special significance in the novel; apart from their defamiliarising effect in terms of cultural space, they are images frequently used in Urdu literature and also serve as metaphors for certain characters. For example, when Jugnu and Chanda disappear, peacocks are found in their house, which starts a neighbourhood rumour that they are what the lovers have turned into. This alleged metamorphosis is especially interesting from the religious point of view that the narrator recalls later in the novel: “The faithful have always been ambivalent towards peacocks because it was this kind-hearted creature that had inadvertently let Satan into the garden of Eden” (*MLL* 334). The metaphor therefore suggests the lovers’ innocence and it may also imply that their death marks the first publicly visible act of violence in the community, a crime which disrupts the community’s absolute space³⁶ (bounded and dominated by orthodox Islam, which exercises a totalitarian authority over its inhabitants) and which has irreversible consequences in the life of its members. As for the moths, the study of which the lepidopterist Jugnu dedicates his life to, they appear several times in the novel and lend themselves to two main interpretations. First, they refer to the lost lovers – they are said to be “angels, the spirits of the departed by others, or lovers in disguise” (*MLL* 196) – and their fatal attraction, which is similar to that of moths to fire; as Lindsey Moore notes, they are “associated with the dangers of sexual transgression” (8). Second, they symbolise transformation and indicate the process of metamorphosis the novel’s characters (especially the second generation) go through, an idea which is central to Aslam’s account of the diasporic community, as the Octavio Paz quote starting off the novel signals: “A human being is never what he is but the self he seeks.”

By means of the South Asian imagery and its cultural connotations Aslam achieves a double effect: he both emphasizes the community’s attachment to their lost homeland with its flora and fauna, and turns the image of the pure English country into a hybrid bi-cultural British space. As the native and natural living world of the countryside still “harbours a whole host of patriotic reactions in the collective psyche” (Agyeman 336), and native plants, as opposed to “alien” plants, “are seen as the ‘rightful’ inhabitants of British landscapes” (Agyeman and Spooner 199-200), the presence of exotic animals and plants is often thought to entail the possibility of pollution and hybridization. Likewise, as Julian Agyeman notes, “black people in the countryside are perhaps seen as ‘polluting’ human ‘aliens’; they are perceived as being ‘out of place’” (336). Interestingly, fear of contamination and

³⁶ In the postcolonial situation, the concept of Euclidian absolute space as fixed, unchanging and homogeneous may be applied to such closely-knit, isolated immigrant communities like those of the British Muslims, which, as portrayed in Aslam’s novel, are ghettoised both from the outside and from within.

hybridization is just as strong among the Pakistani Muslim community as it is among the white inhabitants of Dasht-e-Tanhaii, and such fears are equally triggered by the English and by community members with a different religion or from a different region in the subcontinent.

The Pakistani Muslims of the novel form a closely-knit community or a so-called “parallel society”³⁷ (Weingarten 2), which marks its own territory, and creates its diasporic space within urban space by trying to isolate itself both from ‘white’ England and other diasporic communities. By doing so, *Maps* metaphorises otherness and cultural isolation by the somewhat paradoxical tropes of ‘the country within the city,’ and the alleged (or hoped) cultural purity of diaspora subjects. Apparently, most members of the community keep themselves to themselves and try to avoid any contact with representatives of any different religion, ethnicity or race. One of the main characters of the novel, the religious fundamentalist Kaukab, for example, is a typical representative of this self-imposed and thorough self-differentiation and isolation: “...Ustad Allah Bux Street. I don’t go there often – white people’s houses start soon after that, and even the Pakistanis there are not from our part of Pakistan” (*MLL* 42). What we can witness here is “internal forms of cultural racism” (Butt 161), diverted to fellow South Asians who are othered on the basis of religion, ethnicity and kinship, and of Pakistan’s ongoing feuds with India and Bangladesh. The Hindu members of the community are discriminated and treated as inferior and are therefore not to be ‘mixed with.’ In fear of hybridization, cross-faith marriage is a taboo – Kaukab’s brother, for example, is forbidden to marry a Hindu woman, Kiran, while a Muslim girl is forced into an arranged marriage and can only meet her Hindu lover in secret.³⁸

Interestingly, the only case when the various ethnic and religious groups within the diaspora are united is when it comes to their ‘black racism,’ that is, their prejudice and hatred directed to the collective enemy, the white English. In the novel it is a neighbourhood curse to say “may your son marry a white woman” (*MLL* 118), and the English serve as bogeymen in disciplining the children. Partly due to religious doctrines, partly as a response to the (institutional) racism the diasporic community encounters in its daily life, it perceives the

³⁷ The sociological term “parallel societies” marks a legal dominant society and an illegal second society, and is often used to describe closely-knit immigrant communities. For further reference see for instance Rosenow-Williams (2012).

³⁸ The lovers’ story takes a tragic ending in the novel: as the girl neglects her wifely duties, her parents ask for an exorcism to clear her of djinns and in the process the holy man beats her to death. Her Hindu lover cannot attend the funeral and can only visit her grave at night, when he believes to see the girl’s lost soul illuminating the darkness of the forest. Along with Jugnu and Chanda, Kiran and Kaukab’s brother, or Shamas and Suraya, they are the lost lovers of the novel’s title, and the casualties of religious feuds and doctrines within the community.

English as an immoral, abject race and tries to avoid any verbal or physical contact with them. Kaukab, like most Muslims in the neighbourhood, has special ‘outdoor clothes’ lest she should be contaminated by the English and transmit this contamination to her home:

England is a dirty country, an unsacred country full of people filthy with disgusting habits and practices, where, for all one knew, unclean dogs and cats, or unwashed people, or people who have not bathed after sexual congress, or drunks and people with invisible dry drops of alcohol on their shirts and trousers, or menstruating women, could very possibly have come into contact with the bus seat a good Muslim has just chosen to sit on, or touched an item in the shop that he or she has just picked up. (*MLL* 267)

The extract shows how abjection is manifested in bodily residues, religiously defined as defiling or contaminating. Kaukab’s fear of abjection, however, is not an isolated phenomenon; it characterises the whole community, just as it saturates the whites’ reactions to the immigrants. In Julia Kristeva’s view, abjection is “a danger to identity that comes from within” (*Powers* 69), while the hybridity of the abject,³⁹ i.e., its in-between nature, which “does not respect borders, position, rules,” disturbs “identity, system, order” (*Powers* 49) both in the individual and in society. Abjection, then, is an “exclusion or taboo” (*Powers* 17), a “defilement” which is “connected with the boundary, the margin” (*Powers* 66). According to David Sibley, the abject is

constituted by an array of socially constructed ‘others’ which define the boundary separating the self and the social world, but they also define the boundary that separates a social collectivity from the larger society. There is a strong desire to expel the abject, but it hovers on the boundary of the self or the community, threatening but, at the same time, confirming identity. (“Endangering” 212-3)

³⁹ Perceiving the hybrid as abject points to the understanding of hybridity as mongrelisation in a negative sense, which Aslam emphasises in the racist discourse of a white English child who describes Kaukab’s mixed race grandson as “half Pakistani and half...er...er...er...human” (*MLL* 10). Similarly, the first-generation South-Asian immigrants are also frequently portrayed as fervently opposing interracial affairs and marriages and fearing the mongrelisation of their race and cultural identity; note for example Kaukab’s initial attitude to Charag and Stella’s marriage, or a mother’s fears as unveiled in Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth*: “Even the unflappable Alsana Iqbal would regularly wake up in a puddle of her own sweat after a night visited by visions of Millat (genetically *BB*; where *B* stands for Bengali-ness) marrying someone called Sarah (aa where ‘a’ stands for Aryan), resulting in a child called Michael (*Ba*), who in turn marries somebody called Lucy (aa), leaving Alsana with a legacy of unrecognizable great-grandchildren (Aaaaaaa!), their Bengali-ness thoroughly diluted, genotype hidden by phenotype” (327).

In my view, *Maps* presents a twofold, two-way fear of abjection, which is also made spatially visible in the topography of Dasht-e-Tanhaii. The spatial isolation of the community comes both from the outside and the inside: first, dominant culture excludes the immigrant community, driving it to the periphery of society, to prevent the contamination of traditional English cultural space. As a result, the poorer immigrant neighbourhoods, which are like “pockets of the Third World within the First” (*MLL* 161-2),⁴⁰ that is, they are situated *inside* the town, may very much remain in the *outside*. As Aslam describes, the town “lies at the base of a valley like a few spoonfuls of sugar in a bowl” (*MLL* 10), and the immigrants have to climb a hill to reach the town centre; their upward journey is thus a metaphor of the difficulties of immigrants, “losers at the margins of society” (Butt 154), in moving from the periphery to the centre. The immigrants’ location/position at the periphery may also be perceived as a sign of their displacement as deterritorialization – as Deleuze and Guattari assert, “flows of deterritorialization go from the central layer to the periphery, then from the new center to the new periphery” (53). Although Deleuze and Guattari describe the phenomenon in relation to nomadic deterritorialization, I suggest that it may also be relevant in analysing the movement of the South Asian diaspora: the diasporic subjects leave the centre of their alleged placed-bound identity (the homeland) for the periphery, i.e., for a far-away land (the host country) – this I perceive as physical deterritorialization. Then, having arrived at the centre of the former British Empire, they are forced to the periphery of society (by ways of marginalisation, discrimination, exclusion etc.) – hence a second, social deterritorialization. On the other hand, the immigrant neighbourhood may be appropriated as a pure and confined space, drawing its boundaries to exclude the ‘abject’ English, thus positioning *them* at the periphery. Such a spatial and cultural exclusion, however, may prove to be a mere illusion or self-deception in view of diaspora space, as interaction and mingling between the two cultures and spaces are unavoidable.

Diaspora space and hybridization

Diaspora space, in Avtar Brah’s words, is “the intersectionality of diaspora, border, and dis/location” (208) and as such a liminal zone: a space of “ambiguity and discontinuity,” “a source of anxiety” and “a zone of abjection” (Sibley, *Geographies* 33). The spatial aspects of

⁴⁰ This metaphor is also relevant for diaspora spaces in urban settlements, such as Tower Hamlets in *Brick Lane* or Pollokshields in *Psychoraag*.

abjection explain the Muslim community's physical isolation or self-ghettoisation, as well as their desire for a "spatial purification" (Sibley, *Geographies* 77). As part of the purification process, "[t]he whites were already moving out of here by the end of the 1970s, and within the decade the Hindus became the first immigrant group to move out to the suburbs ... leaving behind the Pakistanis, the Bangladeshis, and a few Indians" (*MLL* 46). In order to keep the neighbourhood clean and to avoid further abjection by the presence of a handful of 'impure' (Hindu and Sikh) families, the Muslim community draws borders *within* its borders. Such internal borders may be physical (exemplified by the avoidance of certain streets and places), social (manifested in inhuman social practices such as forced marriage and exorcism to get rid of impurity and the possibility of hybridity) or mental (which in Kaukab's case is signalled by her rejection of anything and anyone incomformable to her orthodox belief). However, the strong multiple borders create a "strongly classified environment" where abjection, paradoxically, "is most likely to be experienced" (Sibley, *Geographies* 80-1). In *Maps* abjection becomes "a perpetual state" (Sibley, "Families" 117), intertwining by necessity with border-crossing, transgression and hybridity.

The novel presents a three-fold process of hybridization, in terms of nature, space and people. By representing the metamorphosis of urban space into rural, of English cultural space into bicultural (with the emphasis on the immigrants' culture), Aslam creates an environmentally, "culturally and linguistically hybrid landscape" (Moore 15), and exemplifies how diaspora space may be perceived as a "new territoriality" (Fortier, *Migrant* 13),⁴¹ a Bhabhaian third space. Drawing on Brah's concept of diaspora space, I suggest that there are three possible aspects and interpretations of the notion in *Maps*. Firstly, Aslam describes diaspora space as a place inhabited and used by a diaspora subject, its smallest unit being the home as a cultural space impregnated with memories of and references to the home left behind. Secondly, diaspora space is (as I shall explain later) the lived space of a diaspora community within the cultural space of the dominant society, appropriated by cultural and social practices. Finally, diaspora space encompasses a larger area, including the border zones and intersections of the two spaces – as Brah asserts, diaspora space is different from the concept of diaspora itself, inasmuch as it is "'inhabited' not only by diasporic subjects but equally by those who are constructed and represented as 'indigenous'," that is, by those who are "staying put" (16). These three aspects all point to the understanding of diaspora space as

⁴¹ The creation of a diasporic third space, in this case, may be defined as a process of reterritorialization in which "elements reterritorialize themselves onto each other" and "their combined reterritorialization produces a new territoriality" (Fortier, *Migrant* 13).

a third space, but at the same time they offer different topographies and ways of mapping, and imply several layers of spatiality and measures of hybridization. The texture of the novel is generated by the tension and dynamism of these three aspects or processes.

The home as a third space suggests the formation of diaspora space from *within*, i.e. by the self, given that domestic space may be viewed as the imprint of one's (cultural) identity. The interior of Shamas and Kaukab's house, for example, is designed to represent and constantly remind its inhabitants of their roots:

One blue, one strawberry pink, one the yellow of certain Leningrad exteriors: these were the colours of the three rooms in the olive-green house in Sohni Dharti ... He had painted the rooms in this house with these three colours, surprising himself by reproducing the three shades precisely. It's almost as though when he stood facing a corner as a child during a game of hide-and-seek, it was for the sole purpose of committing its colour to memory, to be able to conjure it up in the years of exile and banishment. (*MLL* 5-6)

The duality of home and exile, which Aslam indicates with the above allegory (standing in the corner during the game foreshadowing the banishment of migration), shapes domestic space as an in-between diaspora space for its inhabitants, who are trapped between their past life-space, 'committed' to memory, and the concrete locality of the exilic present. Most of the scenes that take place in the home are focalised through Kaukab. The lengthy descriptions of preparing food, tidying the house and praying suggest that these activities fill up her life, and provide an excuse for never leaving the home, making it a self-induced space of isolation:

It was as though, when the doors of Pakistan closed on her, her hands had forgotten the art of knocking; she had made friends with some women in the area but she barely knew what lay beyond the neighbourhood and didn't know how to deal with strangers: full of apprehension concerning the white race and uncomfortable with people of another Subcontinental religion or grouping. (*MLL* 32)

The isolating and isolated space of the home allows little room for movement and identity formation, and rarely incites a desire for mapping the surrounding world. Kaukab's ventures outside the house are limited to certain activities (e.g. shopping), and 'safe' routes and areas that she charted in the early days of migration. Due to her fears and repulsions, Kaukab lives as a recluse in domestic space, motionless as "a picture of loneliness" (*MLL* 45); almost all

movements she makes are mental: remembering the Pakistan of her youth and the peaceful days before her children fled from home, pushed away by the crimes she committed against them driven by blind faith. Orthodox faith and religious practices here both strengthen the links with the homeland and hamstring operating in the host country; they transform domestic space into diaspora space but disrupt the unity of the family as a diaspora community; they serve as a means of protection against abjection and hybridization, threatening to enter domestic space as well, but, due to even a limited number of outside influences, they create a crisis of identity. Kaukab, who seems to have a ‘fixed’ identity⁴² and the most stable faith among the characters, finds herself caught between two worlds, in a “constant struggle between orthodox religion and modernity” (Butt 160):

Here Kaukab is away from her children, away from her customs and country, alone and lonely, and yet He tells her to have faith in His compassion ... And yet she doesn’t know what to do about the fact that she feels utterly empty almost all the time, as though she had outlived herself, as if she stayed on the train one stop past her destination” (*MLL* 270).

Kaukab’s feeling of isolation and in-betweenness is in part due to the fact that she realises the impossibility of returning to Pakistan, given the rootedness⁴³ of the second generation in England: “I won’t move to Pakistan. What would my life be then? My children in England, me in Pakistan, my soul in Arabia, and my heart ... wherever Jugnu and Chanda are” (*MLL* 146). Even if unintentionally, Kaukab here gives away a sense of belonging to the host country, an attachment created by the birth of her children, as well as the hybridization of her own identity generated by this very attachment, which, however, she is completely unaware of. Vijay Mishra also emphasises the inescapability of hybridization, saying that diasporic cultural identity is “by its very nature predicated upon the inevitable mixing of castes and peoples” (“New Lamps” 67).

Hybridization affects Kaukab *via* her children, and permeates the domestic space *in the form of* the children; as Shamas recalls, “[e]ach time they went out they returned with a new layer of stranger-ness on them until finally I didn’t recognize them anymore” (*MLL* 146). The older son Charag marries a white woman, the daughter Mah-Jabin has the looks and the life of an independent young woman in London, and the youngest child Ujala drinks alcohol

⁴² This also resonates with Mishra’s understanding of old diasporas as essentialist (see “Diasporic” 422), as well as with the fixity imposed on community members by absolute space.

⁴³ In Tuan’s theory, rootedness means “being at home in an unself-conscious way” (“Rootedness” 4).

and masturbates in the family home, thereby contaminating domestic space and violating his mother's religious rules. The more hybridized the children become, the harsher Kaukab's blind faith affects their lives; as Mah-Jabin implies, "[t]rapped within the cage of permitted thinking, this woman – her mother – is the most dangerous animal she'll ever have to confront" (*MLL* 110-1). Apparently, it is not only interaction with 'white space,' but also the fundamental religiousness of the older generation that generates the children's transgression and desire to uproot. Whether engaging in a silent mutiny or openly confronting their parents, the children cannot run away from the humiliations and pains experienced in their community and family;⁴⁴ to Mah-Jabin's mind, "[t]his house is almost not a building but an emotion; every last surface here bears scars of war" (*MLL* 120). Domestic space as the smallest unit of diaspora space thus becomes the battlefield of generational differences and religious ideologies, the site of clashing cultures and identities, and a contested hybrid space.

The second level of diaspora space is represented by the South Asian community; its territory covers the streets and places the community members inhabit and mostly move around in. This level, in my view, can also be approached and analysed from three aspects: as a space appropriated by various social, cultural and spatial practices; as a third space created by interaction with 'white space' and the consequent hybridity of its inhabitants; and as a lived space produced by movement. According to Michel de Certeau, "space is a practiced place" (117). Living in a space of isolation that might be referred to as an ethnic or "immigrant ghetto" (Lemke 166), "both linguistically and hermeneutically" segregated (Upstone, *British Asian* 104), the immigrant neighbourhood of Dasht-e-Tanhaii is appropriated and dominated by the daily practices of its inhabitants. These can be spatial practices (that I shall return to later), cultural/religious practices (e.g. going to the mosque and the Hindu temple, celebrating religious festivals like Eid and Ramadan, and visiting cultural events such as Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan's⁴⁵ performance in the local bookshop) and social practices, most of which Aslam portrays as inhuman and violent: honour killing, exorcism, forced marriages and domestic violence. The immigrant neighbourhood as an absolute space is a space where crimes like rape and paedophilia are tolerated, even overlooked in the name

⁴⁴ Aslam portrays the inability of their escape both from a psychological and a physical aspect. Mah-Jabin, for example, returns to her family home even after her mother injures her with a kitchen knife in the heat of an argument; she is falling into her arms, unable to neglect their bond: "So have mother and daughter always laid claim on each other, consoling to be consoled in return" (*MLL* 99). On the other hand, the inescapability of family bonds is also "taken care of" by a local crime group, "a small discreet operation" (*MLL* 249) which finds runaway westernised children and returns them to their families.

⁴⁵ Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan is, in Aslam's words, "the world-renowned Pakistani singer of Sufi devotional lyrics" (*MLL* 162).

of Allah. Besides, keeping any crime a secret may be, in my view, yet another way the community strives to avoid intrusion and interference by ‘white Britain’ (here, in the form of the police and the legal system). Nevertheless, the exclusiveness and desired purity of this diaspora space cannot be maintained, on one hand, due to the heterogeneity of the community (its members coming from various ethnic, religious and regional backgrounds), and, on the other hand, because of the unavoidable interaction with the ‘white world.’ Consequently, most social practices are directed against hybridization, which is generated by these two factors.

As Dave Gunnig claims, “religion can become both a justification for tyranny and the vehicle of the community’s self harm” (93), that is, although religion seems to justify even the most horrible deeds, they do take their toll on the members of the community, who “live with *quotidian* forms of terror”⁴⁶ (Moore 3) [original emphasis]. Individual emotions and opinions must remain unexpressed and unnoticed; as Kaukab reveals, the neighbourhood “hoards its secrets, unwilling to let on the pain in its breast. Shame, guilt, honour and fear are like padlocks hanging from mouths. No one makes a sound in case it draws attention. No one speaks. No one breathes. The place is bumpy with buried secrets and problems swept under the carpets” (*MLL* 45). In fact, any transgressive act or the slightest sign of Westernisation is severely punished by the family and the community; thence, ‘impure’ deeds and the hybridity of individuals must be disguised or suppressed. Secrets both keep the community together and disrupt its unity; they create a sense of belonging on the surface, but a Weilian rootlessness buried deeply below it; they result in a discrepancy between what is projected and what is experienced – in a constant feeling of in-betweenness in liminal diaspora space.

The in-betweenness of diaspora space is also manifested in the first generation’s inability to belong to their current location or to return to their country of origin, and the second generation’s unwillingness to accept their parents’ birthplace as their home. One of the neighbourhood women, for example, wonders “why her children refer to Bangladesh as ‘abroad’ because Bangladesh isn’t abroad, *England* is abroad; Bangladesh is *home*” (*MLL* 46) [original emphasis]. Apparently, the first generation holds on tight to the memory of an “imaginary homeland”⁴⁷ and thus produces diaspora space as the “miniature” version of this

⁴⁶ Although terror here does not refer to Islamic terrorism but to the torments and humiliation the members of the community experience daily, in an interview Aslam also draws a parallel between the two aspects of the word by saying that his novel depicts “the small-scale Sept. 11s that go on every day” (qtd. in Kapur).

⁴⁷ In *Imaginary Homelands* (1992) Salman Rushdie explains the position of exiles and immigrants who are always “haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back” (10) and argues that they must thereby acknowledge the fact that the homeland they look back at is created through memory, that is, it is a mere construction of the place in the diasporic consciousness: “[O]ur physical alienation from India almost inevitably

homeland: a patriarchal micro-society modelled on a glorified Pakistan (Weingarten 9), where diaspora subjects can preserve their roots, religion, culture and morals, and, by forcing these on the subsequent generations, they can keep long-outdated traditions and the image of home preserved as they were decades ago, frozen in time. From this point of view, the Pakistani Muslim community in Dasht-e-Tanhaii has itself become what Mishra calls the “diasporic imaginary,” a term denoting “any ethnic enclave in a nation-state that defines itself, consciously, unconsciously or because of the political self-interest of a racialized nation-state, as a group that lives in displacement” (“Diasporic” 423). The state of being a diasporic imaginary adds to the creation of the hybridity and in-betweenness of diaspora space in *Maps*: Dasht-e-Tanhaii may be a reterritorialized space but it will never be ‘home;’ it may seem to be a replica of the homeland but merely an imperfect, fractured one, as there will always be a multitude of signs reminding the inhabitants of its illusory quality, from the number of seasons (four instead of five) to the Western influences detectable on the second generation in the process of hybridization.

The creation of diaspora space through westernisation and hybridization points to a reverse direction of the production of space – diaspora space formed from the *outside*. In the eyes of the immigrant community, the ‘white world’ corrupts their children, who refuse to follow the rules of Islam and repeatedly break it by drinking, wearing ‘inappropriate’ western clothes, and having extra-marital sexual affairs. From the point of view of the second generation, hybridization and alienation are both the catalyst and result of a desire to break free from the confines of the community; as Mah-Jabin’s focal point indicates, “in this neighbourhood, and in the way they had been brought up, the things that were natural and instinctive to all humans were frowned upon, the people making you feel that it was you who was the odd one out. Everyone here was imprisoned in the cage of others’ thoughts” (*MLL* 117). To break free, the braver youth engage in movement and various spatial practices, thereby appropriating diaspora space: they transgress the borders both physically and metaphorically, either leaving Dasht-e-Tanhaii for good (such as Kaukab’s children) or creating their own map of diaspora space by finding new routes and hidden places⁴⁸ where they may escape being accused of and punished for “promiscuity on display, debauchery,

means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind” (10).

⁴⁸ One of these hidden places can be found in the forest, where the married Muslim girl and her Hindu lovers are caught by Shamas while making love. Shamas keeps their secret, just like the landscape and the natural world hides the secrets of other lost lovers e.g. “the lake where the many hearts carved on the poles of the xylophone jetty enclose initials in Urdu and Hindi and Bengali as well as English” (*MLL* 17).

lewdness” (*MLL* 144), disobedience or being ‘possessed by djinns.’ However, when such ‘immoral,’ ‘un-Islamic’ acts come to light, the second generation is condemned as ‘polluted’ by the West and for bringing this pollution to the diaspora space with/on itself, i.e., by its hybridized identity it also hybridizes diaspora space, which is supposed to remain fixed, homogeneous and pure. The inhuman social practices portrayed in the novel are (as mentioned before) reactions to the dangers of abjection and hybridization, which, along with the everyday reality of racism, social exclusion and discrimination, make community members strive to emphasise their ‘unhybridized’ cultural identity and belonging to a homeland which is, however, long lost. One of the visitors from ‘back home’ accuses the community of provinciality, backwardness and outdated morals, which, interestingly, evokes the image of Dasht-e-Tanhaii as a rural space and to the regional identities of the countryside. Just as advocates of the nostalgic, idyllic countryside long to preserve its Englishness, so does the diasporic community of Dasht-e-Tanhaii struggle to remain pure. Nevertheless, the presence of immigrants in English cultural space inevitably creates a bi- or multi-cultural British space, which, in return, produces a hybrid diaspora space, and, instead of safeguarded ‘borders,’ a hybrid liminal border-zone.

Mapping and movement in diaspora space

In its alleged isolation, the ‘only’ bridge between the community and the outside world is provided by Shamas, the director of the local Community Relations Council, “the person the neighbourhood turns to when unable to negotiate the white world on its own” (*MLL* 15). Shamas’s hybridization is the necessary result of his role as a mediator between the whites and the Muslim community: he tries to feel at home in, and to take in aspects of, both cultures; however, as a socialist-atheist diaspora subject he is neither an Englishman nor a Muslim, but a unique combination of East and West, an in-betweenener. Shamas also embodies a link between the Hindus and the Muslims in the neighbourhood: he is unbiased and discreet when it comes to extra-marital and cross-faith sexual affairs or to helping a member of the community, regardless of his or her religious affiliation. In his private life, however, Shamas, ‘the patriarch’ appears to be subordinate to his wife: he is too afraid to stand up for his children against their mother, or take the divorcée Suraya⁴⁹ as his second wife.

⁴⁹ The English-born Suraya was married in Pakistan and is forced to return to Dasht-e-Tanhaii after her husband, drunk and unaware of the consequences of his deed, divorces her. Now Suraya’s only chance is to find a new

Shamas's character also exemplifies how the 'white space' hybridizes diaspora space from the outside and creates hybrid identities which cannot live up to the expectations and rules of the Muslim community, thus undermining the domination of absolute space and the make-believe unity of its inhabitants. Furthermore, as the community member who makes the most journeys between the two 'worlds' and within the neighbourhood, his figure embodies the borderland of the two spaces, while his movement in space allows for the interpretation of diaspora space as a lived space. According to David Morris, lived space is "the *sens* we make of our movement in place, lived space is the *sens* of place reanimated in our movement" (180).⁵⁰ Morris draws on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1945) theory of the body's movement in the world, and his work also points to De Certeau's concept of lived space, which is characterised by movement and is reappropriated by spatial practices, by people's "ways of operating" (walking, naming, narrating, and remembering) in space (xiv). The portrayal of the immigrant neighbourhood of Dasht-e-Tanhaii exemplifies how a place metamorphoses into a lived diaspora space through the 'operations' of its inhabitants and how these operations take various forms: the focalisation of the main characters, renaming as part of the process of reterritorialization, and physical movement in space, which, in many cases, is portrayed as a mapping of the topography and cultural space of the town.

Shamas's map of Dasht-e-Tanhaii – as opposed to the limited territory within which Kaukab moves daily – is made up of various routes across the neighbourhood from places such as the Hindu temple and mosque, or Kiran's house (next to the home of the alleged white prostitute that Shamas would like to but dares not visit), through gardens and parks, along rechristened streets and lanes rising up to the hill, to the bridge over the river that needs to be crossed if one wants to go to the city centre; that is, to the border-zone. While moving through this space, Shamas is always deep in thought. He recalls the early days of migration and the creation of diaspora space through renaming; each building and plant evokes memories of, and thus is compared to, his native town in Pakistan, or is reminiscent of his late brother Jugnu's life, disappearance and supposed death. Shamas's walks provide a personalized map of the neighbourhood, which is constantly subject to change, according to the particular

husband: "[A]ccording to Islamic law I cannot remarry him until I marry someone else first. The new man would have to divorce me soon after we marry and then I'd be free to marry the father of my son again" (*MLL* 131). Although Shamas sees nothing immoral in having a sexual affair with Suraya, he refuses to help her out, saying he cannot marry her "on principle" (*MLL* 226), opposing the Islamic rule that a man is allowed to have four wives. His reasons for denying her request, however, may be more complicated than this: since he is in love with Suraya, he may not want to lose her to another man. On the other hand, he is probably also too afraid of Kaukab's (and the community's) reaction to make this relationship public or legal.

⁵⁰ In *The Sense of Space* Morris uses the French word *sens*, which not only "connotes meaning and the senses, but direction" as well, and by doing so, it is "a meaning within a movement that crosses body and world" (24).

motivations for his journeys and the roles he performs during them, and evokes Deleuze and Guattari's claim that the map is "open and connectable ... detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification," it has "multiple entryways" and it "has to do with performance" (12).

Shamas's map of Dasht-e-Tanhaii presents an unusual topography of the anonymous northern town; through his perspective the urban area merges with the English countryside, which metamorphoses into a hybrid landscape when seen through memories of the homeland. Furthermore, by taking different routes, performing several identities⁵¹ and brooding over sundry memories, Shamas draws variant maps of this territory each time he moves about in it; even taking his habitual route to town may end up in detours and result in an altered vision or a new image of diaspora space. At the end of the novel, when Shamas eventually loses Suraya, maps for him become a vital necessity and the representation of his obsession for her: "[F]rom now on he'll see everywhere a possible map that'll lead him to her. He fears he is going to end up wandering around this town, muttering her name" (*MLL* 280). However, when he is looking for his lost lover in the dark forest, his maps fail him: "[I]nstead of beginning the journey that would take him back home, he takes the path that leads to the cemetery ... he ends up suddenly lost in the fringe of bracken ... not knowing when he had left the path ... He is lost, alone here with his mind" (*MLL* 364). By engaging in an affair with Suraya and not marrying her, Shamas deludes both his wife and his lover; he wanders off all his well-known paths, thereby realising his directionless and lost position in diaspora space – he becomes one of the ghosts of lost lovers glowing in the dark.

The novel offers several allegories of the map, "positionality, movement and practices," which, according to Steve Pile and Nigel Thrift, "set out the modalities through which subjects come to place themselves into power-ridden, discursively-constituted, practically-limited, materially-bounded identities" (36); that is, mapping places is strongly linked to mapping and identifying one's self. According to Paul Rodaway, the map is "a representation of the subject, it is an interpretation and an abstraction ... The metaphor of a map suggests that somehow the subject exists on its own, like an object, with location, form and arrangement" (224). Proceeding from these interpretations, I argue that the maps in the novel's title refer not only to how the diaspora redraws the map of the town and thence the English countryside, but also to the process of identity formation and construction: to the

⁵¹ Throughout the novel Shamas appears in various roles, which I view as identity performances: mediator, pander, confidant, lover, husband, patriarch, socialist, atheist, dreamer and poet.

search of the self lost both in English cultural space and in the paradoxical plasticity and grip of diaspora space, and to the possible ways of finding the self through movement and mapping.

Dasht-e-Tanhaii, the unnamed English town, needs to be given a name and to be mapped by the immigrants so that they can make sense of the place. Naming and mapping, however, are not perfect synonyms: first, because we may give names to the places we experience but not necessarily indicate them on a map; and second, since the names on a map do not by any means correspond to the commonly used names for certain places; that is, the two notions may correlate and overlap but not cover each other entirely. As Nicole Schröder suggests, “unnamed places are to a certain extent non-existent, just like an uncharted territory that is represented by a blank spot on a map. Humans need pattern, a representation through which they can grasp the unknown” (11-12). For the immigrants in *Maps*, then, naming and mapping may denote slightly different aspects and strategies of familiarisation: naming serves as a way to create familiarity and a new reality, a basis for their existence in Britain, while by mapping, and subsequently by making sense of place and this new reality, the community is able to create a space to live in, which means that their mapping may be interpreted as “a human imposition on space and in this way, it is involved in the production of space” (Schröder 12).

In Aslam’s novel mapping is a metaphor⁵² of multiple meanings. For most immigrants in the neighbourhood, it is “the naming, locating, and representing of a space in relation to what we already know of the world” (Schröder 11), that is, their renaming of places and streets can be interpreted also as a form of mapping. For Kaukab, on first arriving in England, mapping denotes finding the way – “a way of understanding the unknown, an ordering of the vastness and complexity of the space surrounding” her (Schröder 11) – and it is a means of creating a safe place to practice her religion in. For Shamas, on the other hand, mapping is first and foremost finding a way to other people and to himself, an exploration of space and self. The various maps different characters draw of the same places and space result not only in the metamorphosis of English cultural space, but also in the transformation of diaspora

⁵² Ever since Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, mapping has been a significant metaphor in literature, and it is a frequent trope in postcolonial and British Asian diaspora literature alike. Postcolonial examples include Brian Friel’s play *Translations* (1980), where the map appears as a means of standardisation and Anglicisation in Ireland, and Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* (1992), which presents mapping both as a way to get to know the unknown and as the tool of Western colonisation. Kamila Shamsie’s 2002 novel, *Kartography*, extends the metaphor of the map to include not only the political function of mapping but, by organising the novel in the form of a map, a kind of verbal mapping as well, showing how the drawing and re-drawing of maps can create different stories and realities.

space into several personalised diaspora spaces that make up one diverse and fluid, hybrid third space. Schröder conceives this phenomenon in the following way: “[W]e always add our own needs, our viewpoints, experiences and intentions to these maps. Hence, maps, topographies in general, are representations as well as productions of space, tools for the maintenance of a (spatial) status quo as well as for resistance and the creation of alternative spatial layouts” (12).

Through mapping Kaukab marks out her own private pure space, while Shamas appropriates diaspora space in its third and broadest sense, encompassing the border-zone as well: “He comes to the end of the road through the wild cherry trees and begins to walk along the wider road it gives on to. On its way into the town centre, this road ... leaps over the river ... Just at the place where the road briefly becomes a bridge” (*MLL* 17) starts the forest hiding secret lovers, the lake where his children were fishing in summer, the *Safeena* (the Urdu bookshop) and “Scandal Point” (*MLL* 156), where Shamas and Suraya have their secret rendezvous. Although a liminal zone, and thus allegedly exposed to intrusion, trespassing and transgressing, Shamas perceives it as a safe haven, where “[n]othing untoward appeared to have occurred” (*MLL* 18). What makes this peaceful, secure place a space is the movement in and through it; by its transitory, in-between and permeable nature, it becomes a third space, and as such, a indispensable part of diaspora space.

The proper diaspora space of the neighbourhood may be interpreted as both a lived space and a dwelling space, which Morris theorises in the following way: “When we do not merely move through place, but move *in* it, *dwell* in it, perhaps *place* senses our movement, that is, place gives our movement a sense, direction ... When we dwell in a place we connect with it in a different way, and that connection makes us re-sense our sense of space” (181) [original emphasis]. In contrast, the border-zone in my reading is a lived space *par excellence*, it is “what appears to us when we move in place, the sense we take away from place in moving through it” (Morris 181). Inasmuch as a border-zone is a liminal, hybrid space, by moving through and mapping this space in *Maps*, the trespasser takes its liminality and hybridity and ‘carries’ them into both directions, to ‘white space’ and proper diaspora space alike. Thus, Dasht-e-Tanhaii itself becomes a diaspora space in its broadest sense and the prototypical site of a universal diaspora experience.

In “Mapping the Subject” Pile and Thrift assert that the map and the subject “reveal identity: its fluidity and fixity, its purity and hybridity, its safety and its terrors, its

transparency and its opacity” (46). Pursuing this claim, I argue that Aslam’s novel reveals all the above mentioned qualities and connotations of identity in his characters, as well as in the urban and rural, bi-cultural and diaspora spaces he portrays. The diaspora subjects of Dasht-e-Tanhaii may appear to be trapped and fixed in their self-induced isolation but by and along with the metamorphosis of spaces – and the metamorphosis of the *identity* of spaces – their identity also goes through a process of formation – in a way, they are being reborn: “Charag sometimes feels that to come to this old neighbourhood of Dasht-e-Tanhaii, these Asian streets and lanes of his childhood, is like entering one large labour room, full of the voices of women expressing a spectrum of emotions. It’s like being born” (*MLL* 132). This quotation suggests an undisputable link between diaspora space and diasporic identity, which both denote the birth of something new, a metamorphosis which Rushdie asserts in the first line of *The Satanic Verses*: “To be born again...first you have to die” (1). The (re-) birth metaphor in Aslam’s novel, relating the metamorphosis of the immigrant into a hybrid subject through migration and diaspora experience, suggests a repeated reterritorialization, a new personalised map of space and self – that is, the formation of a new layer of space, a new layer of identity upon the other, producing fluidity and hybridity. By representing the fluidity and hybridity of diasporic identity and diaspora space in an unnamed, neutral locus, Aslam puts them in a wider context and universalises the immigrant experience of British Muslims and, in a way, of all diasporas “in this Dasht-e-Tanhaii called the planet Earth” (*MLL* 367).

Anita and Me

Although Meera Syal’s novel focuses on the immigrant experience of the South Asian diaspora from a non-religious perspective, it shares several features (and recurring diasporic tropes) with *Maps for Lost Lovers*. Similarly to Aslam, Syal uses the country as the setting of her novel; however, while *Maps* is set in a town, Syal’s imaginary village in the North of England is a rural setting in the English countryside. Another important difference is that in Aslam’s novel the allegorical Arabic name of the unnamed town implies a universal, neutral place and the defamiliarisation of English cultural space, whereas Tollington in *Anita and Me* is a possible (in fact, existing) English place-name, and, by naming the neighbouring towns (e.g. Wolverhampton and Birmingham), Syal gives the fictional village a concrete location on the map as part of the Black Country, thus making the immigrant experience of her characters more palpable. Furthermore, while there is hardly any white presence in *Maps*, *Anita and Me*

portrays an almost entirely ‘white space’ in the countryside,⁵³ where the Kumar family create their own diaspora space and form an oddly convergent community with the villagers. Taking my cue from the novel’s portrayal of different forms of metamorphosis, triggered mainly by the ‘natives’ and the immigrants in close proximity and constant interaction, I shall map the spatial and social dynamics of the community and of rural space to examine how, as opposed to the resistant and relatively passive Pakistani immigrants in *Maps*, the Kumars succeed in creating a diasporic community and how their cultural practices signify the possibility of achieving a sense of belonging, as well as of constructing and internalising their diasporic hybrid identity, and a more active diasporic agency.

Syal’s representation of rural space in the Midlands sheds a new light on how the English countryside has changed with the appearance of South-Asian immigrants, who transformed it from a romanticized English cultural space into the multi-ethnic Black Country it is today. Recalling the early days of this metamorphosis in the 1960s, Syal documents the ambivalent relationship between the locals and the new immigrants, as well as the growing influence of social change and racism on the immigrants’ lives. While Aslam’s *Maps* primarily deals with the immigrant experience and marginalisation of the first generation, Syal’s novel focuses on the everyday life and identity formation of the second; it is a semi-autobiographical novel, placing a second-generation child in the role of the narrator and cultural translator and thereby providing a first-hand experience of what it meant to be born into a minority and brought up in the Midlands in the 1960s.⁵⁴ The novel portrays how the two worlds of young diasporic subjects collide, creating a crisis of cultural identity and a sense of unbelonging; that is, *Anita and Me* is “less concerned with [the diasporians’] cultural marginalization than with the material realities of their everyday existence, as they negotiate the tensions between their desires and the expectations of their first-generation parents” (Campbell-Hall 289). According to Devon Campbell-Hall, Meena is represented as “not only straddling the fence between British and Asian cultures, but also as fluctuating between childhood innocence and adult knowledge” (291). What I am chiefly interested in here is how Meena’s unique perspective and narration offer an alternative vision of diasporic

⁵³ Syal’s use of a white space for the setting of her novel points to dominant discourses on the English countryside, which Neal explains as follows: “[R]ural spaces were imagined and represented as picturesque, unchanging sites of social order and deference, of community sameness and familiarity and part of this was a representation of the countryside as a ‘white space’. In this way the English countryside was collapsed into a discursive tool of social reassurance” (20).

⁵⁴ It must be noted here that with *Anita and Me* Syal follows the footsteps of her mentor at the Asian Women Writers’ Workshop (AWWW), Ravinder Randhawa, who foregrounded British-born second-generation women’s experiences and in-betweenness in her novels, *A Wicked Old Woman* (1987) and *The Coral Strand* (2001).

consciousness, of dealing with the feeling of otherness, in-betweenness and dislocation before she “comes to terms with her complex cultural positioning” (Upstone, *British Asian* 122) and hybrid identity. Furthermore, I shall examine how lies and fiction, mimicry and identity performance form an indispensable part of identity construction.

Perspective and diasporic presence

For 10-year-old Meena, Tollington is *the* home where she was born, the only home she knows. It is a peaceful place, somewhere between rural and suburban, with “posh, po-faced mansions” (AM 11) running up to a hill from which the silhouette of Wolverhampton can be glimpsed, and with rows of terraced houses in the valley, “merging into miles of flat green fields” (AM 11). The former mining village has long lost its wealth, but it is the natural environment that draws the Kumars to the village in the first place:

[M]y mother knew what she wanted. When she stepped off the bus in Tollington, she did not see the outside lavvy or the apology for a garden or the medieval kitchen, she saw fields and trees, light and space, and a horizon that welcomed the sky which, on a warm night and through squinted eyes, could almost look like home. (AM 35)

This perception of the countryside both contradicts and corresponds to that of the characters in *Maps*. On the one hand, for the Muslim community the landscape is initially more alien than familiar, or, at least, they tend to emphasise the differences, whereas the Kumars project their memories of home onto the landscape and thus notice the similarities.⁵⁵ On the other hand, the renaming of places and the exotic imagery in *Maps* achieve the same effect as Mama’s biased, ‘sugar-coating’ vision – to some degree, it generates a sense of belonging by being vested with certain qualities of the homeland, and thus evoking nostalgia in the immigrant. Meena’s narration (or, more precisely, the adult Meena’s recollection) serves as a kind of filter mediating the reality of this semi-rural space, revealing Tollington’s ‘Englishness’ and literal scantiness.

⁵⁵ According to Margaret C. Rodman, “people often see a new landscape in terms of familiar ones. This is a multilocal way of sorting out meaning” (647). As for immigrants, anthropological studies have shown that their experience of the landscape of the host country may be strongly influenced by the experience of familiar landscapes of the homeland, i.e., in certain cases they are more likely to notice the similarities rather than the differences. For more reference, see for example Leonard (1997).

Perspective is a keyword in Syal's portrayal of the immigrant experience in Britain. It is their admittedly subjective perspective that enables the Kumars to view England as a place of opportunities and a second home which they can share with their extended family, and it is also perspective that makes them feel superior to the English, who they perceive as uneducated, unclean, uncivilised – without culture and legacy. It is Meena's perspective that presents Tollington as a god-forsaken place she yearns to leave behind, yet also a site of adventure and discovery, and – thanks mainly to the seemingly deserted Big House with its “always drawn curtains” (*AM* 15), mysterious inhabitants, huge forest-like garden and the sinister Hollow Pond – as an enigma. In this respect, the Big House is a key motif (and perhaps the perfect metaphor) of the narrative, because it is a central element of the English countryside and, by extension, English cultural identity.⁵⁶ The mystery it embodies may be interpreted as the mystery of Englishness itself that little Meena is unconsciously striving to solve. Furthermore, the fact that the labyrinth of the garden hides a Ganesha statue subverts dominant discourses on the countryside and English identity, just like the ‘fictionalising’ perspective of the protagonist-narrator – a notorious liar with a fertile imagination – subverts the narrative by disguising “falsehoods with the veil of realism” (Upstone, *British Asian* 123).

Right at the beginning of the novel, Meena admits being “a sucker for a good double entendre,” adding that in her case there is always a “gap between what is said and what is thought, what is stated and what is implied” (*AM* 10). Since she is constantly caught fantasising and lying, distorting and making up ‘reality,’ through her portrayal the Big House and all that it metaphorises become a riddle or conundrum to the reader, and the question of presence and representation become problematic. Like the Big House, the village and its inhabitants are only seen from her perspective, thus the reader's perception becomes necessarily guided and also somewhat biased, since, in Roger Bromley's words, “the controlling gaze is British Asian” (145). Through Meena's eyes we see a “reverse stereotyping or caricaturing” (Bromley 145) of the white British, whose voices are “filtered through the mimicry and simulation of the narrator” (Bromley 145). Consequently, Meena's double perspective as the experiencing child and the reminiscent adult is further complicated by the ‘filtered’ perspective of other characters, producing a triple, heavily subjective perspective as well as a subtle and impugnable narrative.

⁵⁶ As Agyeman and Rachel Spooner contend, country houses and estates form “the cornerstone of rural Englishness” (195).

One example of the novel's narrative technique and the problem of perspective may be provided by its treatment of black presence in Tollington and the 'unveiling' of the secret of the Big House. Meena's introduction of the village reads as follows: "It had been the community of tough, broad-armed women and fragile old men until a few new families started moving in, drawn by the country air and dirt-cheap housing – families like us" (AM 14). The unreliability of the narrator is present on two levels here: first, by speaking about the broad-armed English women and the newcomer families, Meena creates a feeling in the reader that these new families are urban Englishmen longing for the country air. By doing so, she creates an "us" that white English readers can identify with, yet, since the Kumars come from the subcontinent, the phrase "like us" becomes subversive: it both establishes a similarity between South Asians and the white English, and suggests the otherness of either or both, thus giving away the 'deviousness' of Meena's imponderable narrative voice.

On a second level, although later Meena mentions that there are a few black pupils in her school, there are no more references to other immigrant families in the novel, neither black nor South Asian; what is more, a few pages later she claims that "we were the only Indians that had ever lived in Tollington" (AM 22). Her words are, however, put in a completely different light when, towards the end of the novel, Meena 'discovers' the secret of the Big House. The house, which is both a secret and a sight, a blind spot and an epicentre, is inhabited by a fellow Indian, Harinder P. Singh, a former owner of the village mine, who now lives the life of a recluse with his French wife. Interestingly, although Hari was "tired of being the only local colour" (AM 318) and happy to learn about the arrival of the Kumars in the village, he never seems to have felt the need to get in touch with them. In Sara Upstone's view, Hari's character on one hand serves to prove for Meena both the possibility of success as a British Asian and the fact that they are not the only Indians in Tollington (Cf. *British Asian* 124); on the other hand, his appearance is a "miracle" (AM 317), an unreality recalled by an unreliable narrator, which may indicate that Meena is "re-writing her childhood isolation to give her childhood self, in the form of Harrinder [sic], a sense of community that the reality of Tollington in fact never offers" (Upstone, *British Asian* 124). Indeed, the riddle and fictionality of the Big House may be interpreted as a metaphor of Meena's unreliable narrative voice and perspective, as well as of the questionability of representation *per se*.

Drawing on this claim, I read Meena's story and the Kumars' presence in Tollington not necessarily as a general or universal account of the diasporic condition and consciousness, but more as an individual example of wishful thinking, a somewhat utopian (re)presentation

of British Asians' belonging in and to the countryside. Without an Indian community in the village, it is only the family and domestic space that may offer Meena a sense of belonging – that is, not the 'lost homeland' or her exact present location in England, in the Midlands, but the house she calls home and describes as follows: "There was my *home*, halfway down the hill, standing on the corner of the crossroads, one of the miners' tithe cottages huddled around a dirt yard which was the unofficial meeting place for our small community" (AM 12) [my emphasis]. The location of the house is quite similar to that of Shamas and Kaukab's in *Maps*, yet it lends itself to a different interpretation in terms of diasporic presence. In contrast with the secluded neighbourhood but nevertheless hybridized diaspora space of Aslam's novel, the Kumars' house indicates the family's special position in the village: halfway between valley and hill, the poor and the rich, the intellectual and educated Kumars occupy an in-between space in Tollington. On a metaphorical level, being at the crossroads suggests in-betweenness, being caught between two cultures, social and moral codes, and ways of identification, and it implies that Meena will have to decide which 'road' to take as she grows up.

The Kumars' status in Tollington is ambivalent because in one respect they are westernised and to some extent even assimilated. They are educated and speak the Queen's English, and although they do not give up their cultural activities they pursue them behind closed doors, that is, apart from Mama's occasional Indian outfit – which serves as the visual representation of all the colours and warmth of the homeland that she has left behind (AM 43) – they behave and look like the English, sometimes even more so. Besides, in contrast with urban space, where immigrants form a visible minority, in the rural space of Tollington the Kumars are (supposedly) the only immigrants, and (whether from Meena's perspective or from that of the white inhabitants) they are therefore viewed as harmless, exotic neighbours, rather than threatening, polluting aliens, out of place (Agyeman 336) in the countryside. With her "grace, dignity and unthreatening charm" Meena's mother attracts "admirers effortlessly" (AM 28), and obtains an insider status in the village; as one of the women tells her: "You're so lovely. You know, I never think of you as, you know, foreign. You're just like one of us" (AM 29). Furthermore, the social dynamics of such a small community is considerably different from those of vast, congested urban spaces: as everyone knows everyone in the villages, the Kumars are just one family among the others; their Indianness is not highlighted as an otherness that is different in kind but fits in well with the oddities of the white locals.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Such oddities include the peculiar gender relations of the village, i.e., it is the "tough, broad-armed women" who are the breadwinners, while the "fragile old men," unemployed after the mine closed down, stay in the

Nonetheless, each weekend that the Kumars are “visiting Indian families or [are] being invaded by them” (AM 29), the neighbourhood is reminded of their cultural identity and difference; as Meena recalls: “I could see our neighbours shift uncomfortably, contemplating the apparent size of my family and the fact that we had somehow managed to bring every one of them over here” (AM 29). The above quotes highlight the Kumars’ multiple and contradictory identifications in village space; individually, they are treated with respect, as “minor royalty”⁵⁸ (AM 28), but as members of the South Asian diaspora, as racialized others, they are viewed with suspicion. If and when perceived as fellow Britons, the family members on one hand manage to avoid discrimination and the effects of the gradually intensifying racism in the village;⁵⁹ on the other hand, such a perception deprives them of their cultural identity and makes Mama piqued: “[T]hey leave us alone because they don’t think we are really Indian. ‘Oh, you’re so English, Mrs K!’ Like it is a bugging compliment!” (AM 172)

Meena’s mother feels and acts as superior to the English, who “treat their dogs like children ... expect their kids to leave home at sixteen ... don’t like bathing” (AM 33) and don’t respect their elders; that is, in her eyes they lack intellect, respect, style and morals, and therefore need to be re-educated:⁶⁰ “[F]or her, looking glamorous in saris and formal Indian suits was part of the English people’s education. It was her duty to show them that we could wear discreet gold jewellery, dress in tasteful silks and speak English without an accent” (AM 25). According to Campbell-Hall, such an attitude is “a direct challenge to outdated colonial notions of Anglo-British superiority,” since “it is the South Asian migrants who bring signifiers of civilisation (education, knowledge of the world outside Tollington, fluency in other languages) to the village” (296). In my view, the Kumars’ alleged superiority also

home. Furthermore, through Meena’s narration the reader gets acquainted with a host of odd characters, such as the volatile Mrs Rutter; Hairy Neddy, the aspiring rock-star; and the Mad Mitchells with their “living sculpture” of junk (AM 163) in the front garden.

⁵⁸ The positive perception and, in some cases, even celebration or admiration of Meena’s mother as an individual echoes Haroon’s apotheosis in *The Buddha of Suburbia* (see Chapter 2) as a spiritual leader to the enlightenment-craving white middle-class residents of Chislehurst, while outside their rooms where he can appear as “a magician, a wonder-maker” (BS 31), racism is a common experience and harsh reality for the members of the South Asian diaspora.

⁵⁹ Although at first glance racism eludes the village of Tollington, as Sara Upstone asserts, the community is “riven by racist ignorance, quickly becoming racist prejudice” (*British Asian* 126), which becomes increasingly apparent in the neighbours’ dog called Nigger, Sam Lowbridge’s racist outburst at the village fete (AM 193) and the “Paki bashing” incident (AM 277).

⁶⁰ It is interesting to compare this stance to that of Kaukab in *Maps* and Chanu in Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane* (see Chapter 3). While Meena’s mother emphasises the inferiority of the English but considers some of their culture worthy of acknowledgment (e.g. their language and literature), Kaukab views them as a source of abjection, whereas Chanu appears as an anglophile, a great admirer of English “high culture,” who perceives his fellow immigrants as “peasants. Uneducated. Illiterate. Close-minded” (BL 28). As suggested, in the eyes of the British Asian diaspora education is not only the key to the success but the primal token of superiority, and thus perhaps the only possible tool to change their subaltern position.

suggests an identity performance, “an elected role as exemplary representatives” (Bromley 145) of Indian culture and all its greatness, and may also be read as a defence mechanism against dominant discourses on the South Asian diaspora, which the parents want Meena to acquire as well: “[T]o be told off by a white person, especially a neighbour, that was not just misbehaviour, that was letting down the whole Indian nation. It was continually drummed into me, ‘Don’t give them a chance to say we’re worse than they already think we are. You prove you are better. Always’” (AM 45).

Mama also warns Meena against assimilation, becoming ‘too English’: “You take the best from their culture, not the worst” (AM 53). This way, the parents amplify (or, from Meena’s perspective, maybe even justify) her feeling of in-betweenness and living in a state of perpetual pretence. Meena not only lies repeatedly to her parents lest she should be caught behaving improperly (e.g. stealing sweets from Mr Ormerod’s grocery) and uncivilised (e.g. cursing and running havoc on the street), but at times she tells lies in order to emphasise the positive sides of her otherness, fictionalising her exoticism by saying she was a princess and had an elephant, or that back in India she “stayed in mud huts and killed a tiger for breakfast” (AM 118). Curiously enough, the parents display a similar sense of in-betweenness and unreliability when they let Meena wear western clothes, attend Uncle Allan’s Sunday school, and even celebrate Christmas. On the other hand, they scold her for her ‘Brummie’ accent, force her to sit down to photographs from India and memorise the relatives’ names “as if committing them to memory would make up for not being with them” (AM 30), they talk about India as home and Indian dishes as homemade “soul” food⁶¹ (AM 61) – that is, they not

⁶¹ The prevalence of references to national cuisine in diaspora novels and of the lengthy descriptions of preparing these dishes must also be noted here. Food not only denotes hospitality, giving and sharing, but also has gender implications and serves as a signifier of ethnicity and culture. Similarly to Mama’s cooking in *Anita and Me*, in *Maps for Lost Lovers* Kaukab’s dishes provide a link to the lost homeland, a means to preserve cultural roots, and may also enable proving cultural superiority by offering rich, well-prepared and nutritious food in contrast with the much-despised take-away food and fish fingers they associate English cuisine with. Besides, the fact that Meena longs for English dishes and refuses to learn to cook Indian food signals her inability to connect with her roots, while Mah-Jabin’s variations on her mother’s recipes indicate hybridization both in terms of traditions and cultural identity. Furthermore, national cuisine may also serve as a means of representation and an indirect way to reterritorialize English cultural space by its very smell. In Saumya Balsari’s *Cambridge Curry Club*, for example, the three South Asian women working in the charity shop owned by an Englishwoman decide to fight the residual colonialism they experience by penetrating the English cultural space of the shop with their traditional dishes: “Lady Di says the shop should not have food smells. We are not allowed to eat warmed-up Indian food here ... from next week we’ll use a hot plate, all right? I’ll tell her straight in the face ... ‘You call us your “Curry Club”, don’t you, so then we are going to eat our Indian food.’ Let it smell, who cares? ... ‘The natives are getting restless. Mutiny. The subaltern speaks’ (188-9). It is also interesting to compare these representations with those appearing in the fiction of other diasporas in Britain. The British Chinese Timothy Mo’s novel *Sour Sweet* (1982), for example, is shot through and through with images of cooking and food, and the latter is presented both as “soul food” (in the home of the protagonist) and as a hybrid cultural product, since the dishes served in the restaurants are altered or ‘Europeanised’ to match English tastes.

only try to *preserve* roots for Meena but also for themselves, and, more importantly, they lend or *recreate* roots for her through ambivalently allegorical acts.⁶² Although Meena cannot feel her parents' stance her own, she is willing to take in Mama's cultural guidance, "her Capital Letter Speeches," which she admits to even enjoy since "[t]hey made me feel special, as if our destiny, our legacy, was a much more interesting journey than the apparent dead ends facing our neighbours" (AM 59) – that is, because they offer her a sense of belonging and make her feel 'other' in a positive way. Meena's words not only imply the importance of legacy and roots for the diasporian in the cultural space of the host country but, given the heroine's inclination to colour reality, they also point to the performance of cultural identity for the sake of ensuring this legacy and roots as well.

Community, performativity and memory

Remembering their legacy and preserving their roots constitute perhaps the most important factor in the parents' search for fellow members of the diaspora in nearby Wolverhampton. Making friends with Indian passers-by in the street, the Kumars soon build an extended family of numerous Aunties and Uncles, who constantly interfere with each other's family matters, but also provide a sense of belonging for the community, and, as Yasmin Hussain observes, by "speaking with a unified cultural voice" (121), they project an image of the diaspora as homogeneous. It is through them that Meena gets to understand the diaspora experience:

I rarely rebelled openly against this communal policing, firstly because it somehow made me feel safe and wanted, and secondly, because I knew how intensely my parents valued these people they so readily renamed as family, faced with the loss of their own blood relations. I understood this because of the snippets of stories I would hear when the grown-ups would sit around on the floor, replete and sleepy, exchanging anecdotes that reinforced their shared histories, confirming that they were not the only ones who were living out this unfolding adventure. (AM 31)

⁶² Several diaspora novels, such as *Maps*, *Brick Lane* and *Tourism*, portray the general tendency of the first generation to attempt to educate their children the traditional way and thereby preserve their roots, ensuring "generational blood-lines of belonging and continuity" (Fortier, *Migrant* 142). This 'guided' rerooting is either achieved by sending children back to the home country for a traditional upbringing (e.g. Magid's return to Pakistan at the age of ten in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*) or for an arranged marriage (e.g. Suraya and Mah-Jabin in *Maps*), or attained by various cultural practices.

As in Aslam's novel, renaming here is a part of the process of reterritorialization; however, in *Maps*, renaming mainly denotes the reterritorialization of places and spaces to achieve a sense of belonging, whereas in *Anita and Me* it is fellow diaspora subjects that stand for the lost homeland and embody homing desire (that I shall return to later on), and belonging is ensured by the creation of the extended family. Although its members dwell in different locations, they frequently gather at the Kumars' to keep a sense of cultural identity and homogeneity alive by singing, cooking, celebrating and remembering. It is through these cultural practices and performances of cultural identity that the group of immigrants – heterogeneous in terms of ethnicity and religion – reinvent themselves as a diaspora community; domestic space transforms into diaspora space, where “tradition is itself continually invented even as it may be hailed as originating from the mists of time” (Brah 208); and the English cultural space of Tollington metamorphoses into a hybrid, bi-cultural space, a third space.

Anne-Marie Fortier refers to cultural practices as “collective performances of identity and belonging,” which involve a Butlerian performativity and “the reification of family values” (*Migrant* 6); that is, as I see it, cultural practices, performed collectively in domestic, communal, and diaspora space, serve to emphasise the cultural identity of a community and its members, and preserve their unity, belonging and cultural roots. *Anita and Me* portrays several such cultural practices, e.g. celebrating religious festivals like Diwali and remembering life back in India. For the purposes of the present analysis, the most exciting example of a cultural practice is the so called *mehfil*,⁶³ which Syal describes the following way:

Papa's *mehfils* were legendary, evenings where our usual crowd plus a few dozen extra families would squeeze themselves into our house to hear papa and selected Uncles sing their favourite Urdu *ghazals* and Punjabi folk songs ... During these *ghazals*, my elders became strangers to me. The Uncles would close their eyes with papa, heads inclined, passions and secrets turning their familiar faces into heroes and gods. The Aunties would weep silently, letting tears hang like jewels from their eyelids, tragedy and memory illuminating their features, each face a *diya* ... when I looked at my elders, in these moments, they were all far, far away. (*AM* 71-2) [original emphasis]

⁶³ A *mehfil* is an Urdu word for an intimate yet festive social gathering for the sake of entertainment; it always involves the performance of classical Indian poetry, music and dance. Historically it was presented in the homes of noblemen; in diasporic settings it is held in the homes of the members of the community and it becomes “a forum for re-affirming one's own identity” (Y. Hussain 123).

What is most noteworthy about this passage is that through Meena's perspective the festive yet intimate event of the *mehfil* transforms into a kind of 'showcase' of gestures and emotions, while the word tragedy puts the whole scene in a theatrical-aesthetic context. When it is Papa's turn to sing, he waits for his listeners to become completely silent, closes his eyes, and his sound, "between a sob and a sigh" (*AM* 72), induces a transformation in the people around him, as well as in Meena's perception of them. His singing is portrayed as if it was a staged performance deliberately directed at the heart of the audience. Meena herself is part of the audience rather than an active participant in the events of the night, thus her remarks, subjective as they are, add up to or, I should say, even create the special atmosphere of the *mehfil* and, by extension, the '*mehfil* of the novel' as well. Furthermore, watching the "elders" return to their homelands through collective and personal memories induced by the songs, Meena's perception of the first generation is enriched by a further layer. As her family members become "strangers" to her, she is offered a chance to get to know them from a new aspect and thereby, though indirectly, her understanding of cultural roots can become more subtle and complex.

The *mehfils* at the Kumars' are an essential link between identity and space, both that of the homeland and of the host country. This link, as the above quotation implies, may be created through collective remembering and by performance and performativity, which make up the cultural practices that seem to be of crucial importance in the preservation of roots and the formation of a diasporic community. In Fortier's view, these cultural practices may not only be expressions of ethnic identity, which by their very nature "mark out spatial and cultural boundaries for the immigrant population" ("Re-remembering" 42), but also performative acts that create a "space of belonging" ("Re-remembering" 47) by rituals and commemorations, i.e., by acting out tradition and performing collective memory. Thence, family and community gatherings, festivals and religious practices may become what Barbara Myerhoff calls "definitional ceremonies": "performances of identity which state the unquestionability of truths, made unquestionable by their performance" (32). The Kumars' *mehfils* are then not only examples of cultural practices in order to stay connected to their roots, but also involve a linguistic and musical expression of cultural identity, that is, the immigrants perform their identities as 'Indian'.

Another interesting aspect of the *mehfils* is that they denote performances of a unified and convergent cultural identity, as well as of a lenient collective memory, neither of which seems to be possible for the diaspora community in *Maps*. Recalling the 1947 Partition and

the massacres committed in the name of religion does not disrupt the community⁶⁴ as it does in Aslam's novel; as Meena recalls, "[n]o one said 'I'm sorry,' like an English person might have done. In the silence that followed, I felt a hundred other memories were being briefly relived and battened down again" (*AM* 74). Although made up of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims (and even an atheist, Meena's father), longing for the subcontinent and sharing the experience of immigration and dislocation unite the community to such an extent that their divergent memories of the Partition create a collective history and memory. According to Yasmin Hussain, the diasporic community in *Anita and Me* "asserts a mythical unity of ethnic imagined communities which divides the world" not on the basis of religion but on that of culture, "between 'us' and 'them'" (121). Hussain here refers to Benedict Anderson's (1983) notion of imagined communities, a metaphor of the modern nation, invented and fabricated as a cultural artefact. In the same vein, an ethnic imagined community is one created by immigrant experience and diaspora culture, that is, imagining a community is, as Fortier claims, "both that which is created as a common history, experience or culture of a group – a group's belongings (Probyn, 1996) – and about how the imagined community is attached to places (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992:10) – the location of culture" ("Re-membering" 42).

These episodes reinforce the powerful link between space and identity, history and tradition, performance and memory; as Fortier notes, tradition "becomes, when performed, a group of remembrances" ("Re-membering" 48). Jan Assmann also emphasises the correlation of tradition and memory, and argues that customs, rituals and festivals are concentrated in the so-called "*lieux de mémoire*" – memory sites which enable the individual living in tradition "to belong, that is, to realize his potential as the member of a society in a sense of a community where it is possible to learn, remember, and to share in a culture" (*Religion* 9). Here Assmann reinterprets and to an extent even simplifies Pierre Nora's concept, which originally refers to sites of memory which do not inhabit living traditions but denote only remnants of the past; they are created by "a play of memory and history" (Nora 295) at the intersection of collective and individual memories. As Schröder notes, *lieux de mémoire* "alternate between artificiality (they help to invent the past and provide room for alternative views of the past) and 'authenticity'" (41). *Lieux de mémoire* replace *milieux de mémoire*, environments of collective memory or what Nora calls "true" memory (285), which are linked to a particular place inhabited by several generations and where traditions are alive, linking

⁶⁴ The religious tolerance and unity described here evokes Saadi's somewhat sarcastic portrayal of the diaspora as "one big happy family. Enemies-become-brothers" in *Psychoraag* (230-1).

the past and the present (289). What Nora's concept suggests, then, is that sites of memory are in fact places of forgetting or misremembering due to the diversity and liability of individual memories. For the diaspora community in *Anita and Me*, *lieux de mémoire* appear to be a transitory zone, denoting the displacement not only of people but of memories as well. Furthermore, as the community members' religious differences necessarily entail different (often contrasting) memories of the same event, the Kumars' living room and the mehfil become sites of memory "where different viewpoints of the past (and hence attitudes towards the present) can be negotiated" (Schröder 42) and transformed into a 'shared history,' commonly agreed on and kept alive by traditions and cultural practices; it is as if the shared act of remembering overruled the divergent memories themselves.

For the Kumars' extended family, the place where they most prominently keep their traditions alive is the home; this diaspora space is both a memory site and the birthplace of a collective cultural memory. For Assmann, cultural memory is a "collective concept for all knowledge that directs behaviour and experience ... and one that obtains through generations through repeated societal practice and imagination" ("Collective" 126). Collective memory involves a degree of emotional attachment and is also related to group/collective identity in that it may serve as a unifying force and as a signifier of social differentiation.⁶⁵ Drawing on Elspeth Probyn's theory of belongings, Fortier claims that "practices of group identity are about manufacturing cultural and historical belongings which mark out terrains of commonality that delineate the politics and social dynamics of 'fitting in'," adding that "some of these belongings may be physical places,"⁶⁶ ("Re-membering" 42) such as the diaspora space created in the Kumar's domestic space.

The community's unity also suggests that their memories of religious wars are overruled by nostalgia and by what Brah calls "homing desire." According to Brah, the concept of diaspora always already embodies a subtext of home and this home is "a mythic place in the diasporic imagination," "a place of no return,"⁶⁷ but also "the lived experience of locality" (192). She goes on to say that the notion of home is always linked with the binary of inclusion/exclusion, and the way members of the diaspora experience their subjectivity. This

⁶⁵ See also Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 38-45.

⁶⁶ Physical places may include temples, mosques, churches, museums, community centres and even the streets in case of festivals.

⁶⁷ The notion of home as a place of no return is exemplified by the extended family's resignation when speaking about the host country: "My Aunties did not rage against fate or England... they put everything down to... their karma" (*AM* 67); and about India: "The loss of a distant parent would be the final proof, that they had left them and would not be returning" (*AM* 86).

means that the notion of diaspora “places the discourse of ‘home’ and ‘dispersion’ in creative tension, *inscribing a homing desire while simultaneously critiquing discourses of fixed origins*” (Brah 192-3) [original emphasis]. For Brah, homing desire is not necessarily a longing to return to one’s “origin” (193), not a desire for *the* homeland, but for *a* place to belong to (197). Consequently, as Susheila Nasta suggests, homing desire implies the reconstruction of home in other places and spaces, and so may be defined as “a desire to reinvent and rewrite home as much as a desire to come to terms with an exile from it. Diaspora is therefore as much settlement as displacement” (*Home Truths* 7-8).

Settlement and the reconstruction of home are indispensable parts of the process of reterritorialization; the Kumars, along with their extended family, reterritorialize English cultural space through their cultural practices, which, at one point, cross the threshold of their home and hybridize ‘white space’: “It felt so strange to hear Punjabi under the stars. It was an indoor language to me, an almost guilty secret which the Elders would only share away from prying English eyes and ears. I ... watched helplessly as the Aunties and Uncles began reclaiming the Tollington night in big Indian portions” (*AM* 203). It is the shared experience, collective memory and the sense of belonging generated by performative practices that enable the creation of the Kumars’ diasporic community and account for the metamorphosis of domestic space into diaspora space, while homing desire may trigger the reconstruction of cultural identity in diaspora space. The construction of cultural identity, however, always involves the construction of cultural difference (Cf. Fortier, *Migrant* 3). When the diasporic community in *Anita and Me* reconstruct their cultural identity, it means that despite the different degrees of assimilation they have gone through individually, they reaffirm their difference from the dominant society as a collective – and all this is spatially manifested in the diaspora space of the Kumars’ home. Diaspora space, then, may be interpreted as the metaphor of cultural sameness and difference, and is closely related to identity as positionality, which James Clifford claims to be “not a process of absolute othering, but rather of entangled tensions” (“Diasporas” 307).

Although the parents try to transmit shared knowledge and traditions to their child, Meena – both because of her tender age, and because she is surrounded by, and firmly rooted in, English culture – does not feel that she is part of their collective cultural memory and identity. For her, the home is not a site of memory or a diaspora space which may offer a sense of belonging, but the site of tensions, the very place of her confused identity:

It was a constant source of embarrassment to me that our front garden was the odd one out in the village, a boring rectangle of lumpy grass bordered with various herbs that mama grew to garnish our Indian meals ... I did not want things growing in our garden that reminded me of yesterday's dinner; I wanted roses and sunflowers and manicured hedges and fountains where the blackbirds would come and sip. (AM 15-16)

While for the parents growing herbs in the garden may provide a further link to the lost homeland and form a substantial part of their cultural practices and identities, for Meena it is but yet another marker of their visible otherness. Since Meena has no emotional attachment to the house as a site of memory, nor does she have a collective memory to share, in her case we can only speak of a certain communicative memory, which describes “the social aspect of individual memory,” “grows out of intercourse between people” and may be defined by a host of emotions such as “feelings of attachment, the wish to belong, but also ... pain, guilt and shame” (Assmann, *Religion* 3). Such emotions may explain Meena's desire “to turn to mythology,” to re-write and re-imagine the past, as well as her identity performances, which are intended to cover her otherness but in fact give away her in-betweenness.

Mimicry and identity performance

Syal's portrayal indicates that for her protagonist it is the discrepancy and conflict between the village space and the diasporic space of the home, Englishness and Indianness, the identity she desires and the identity her parents impose on her, which generates the feeling of in-betweenness, and which she initially accepts as natural and inescapable: “[T]he gap ... is a place in which I have always found myself. I'm really not a liar, I just learned very early on that those of us deprived of history sometimes need to turn to mythology to feel complete, to belong” (AM 10). Meena's invented sense of belonging points to what Probyn calls “the inbetweenness of belonging,” that is, “belonging not in some deep authentic way but belonging in constant movement, modes of belonging as surface shifts” (19).

Nonetheless, as Meena gets more mature and experienced, her cultural difference becomes increasingly disturbing and contradictory – no matter how much she may desire a return to her roots and thereby acquire a sense of belonging, she is constantly reminded of her otherness even in the diaspora. Her ‘cousins,’ Baby and Pinky are the epitome of dutiful Indian daughters, “pleasant, helpful, delicate, groomed, terrifying” (AM 149), and Meena

realises that she could never meet such expectations: “I knew I was a freak of some kind, too mouthy, clumsy and scabby to be a real Indian girl, too Indian to be a real Tollington wench, but living in the grey area between all categories felt increasingly like home” (*AM* 149-50). Meena’s words may be interpreted in two ways. On one hand, she is becoming more and more aware of her cultural in-betweenness and, as the spatial metaphor “like home” implies, she is also starting to feel that it is the place where she truly belongs. On the other hand, the word “freak” suggests that she experiences her otherness not merely in cultural terms but on a level that is physiological: as a kind of monstrosity, an individual (naturally given) freakishness. Throughout the novel, her ‘cultural’ otherness is expressed through the body, through what she thinks of as bodily symptoms. To save herself from being perceived as a monster by others as well, Meena longs to change her appearance and perception in the village, that is, to perform and create a different identity for herself:

I had never wanted to be anyone else except myself only older and famous. But now, for some reason, I wanted to shed my body like a snake slithering out of its skin and emerge reborn, pink and unrecognisable. I began avoiding mirrors, I refused to put on the Indian suits my mother laid out for me ... I took to walking several steps behind or in front of my parents when we went on a shopping trip, checking my reflection in shop windows, bitterly disappointed it was still there. (*AM* 146)

This passage is especially noteworthy inasmuch as it highlights the physical, symptomatic aspects of Meena’s identity crisis. First, Meena’s avoidance of mirrors may be read as a ‘reversed’ Lacanian mirror stage. In Judith Butler’s understanding of this Lacanian notion, the child’s sense of the body is generated through the projection of “an idealized totality” (*Bodies* 43) of the mirror image, and by transforming “a lived sense of disunity and loss of control into an ideal of integrity and control” (*Bodies* 43). In contrast, Meena’s words above suggest a sense of disunity and a self-hatred (a loss of control over her [self-]perception) generated in part by her ‘mirror images’ as reflected in/by other people and the actual mirrors she wishes to avoid, lest they should confirm her feeling of being a freak in the eyes of others. When she yearns for invisibility, she yearns for similarity or sameness with other (white English) people).

Secondly, Meena both longs for the loss of colour, it being a racial signifier, and fears the loss of it, because it is also a cultural marker; in other words, if she was reborn pink she would not only be unrecognizable to white people as a racial other but also to herself, thus

losing a part of her identity. Yet, what Meena wants is merely to become like everybody else, to become “unnoticed” – this desire points to Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of “becoming-imperceptible” (279). For Deleuze and Guattari, to “be ‘like’ everybody else” is “an affair of becoming;” it “requires much asceticism, much sobriety, much creative involution: an English elegance, an English fabric, blend in with the walls, eliminate the too-perceived, the too-much-to-be-perceived” (279). Meena’s wish to blend in, to be transparent and unrecognisable also evokes the concept of passing, “a successful self-representation in line with a socially favoured identity at the expense of an ‘authentic’ one” (Harrison 1), as well as Roger Caillois’s notion of mimicry,⁶⁸ where imitative acts may be performed as a desire for self-erasure, i.e., to do away with the distinctions between itself and its environment, which may, however, result in the loss of identity. Although Meena wishes to be reborn, I do not read her claim as a real desire for self erasure, death or dissolution (although she does admit occasionally expecting something “dangerous and cruel” [AM 37] to happen to her), but as wishful thinking for a new identity, for a chance to do away with the distinctions, which she hopes to achieve by mimicry as camouflage.

Meena’s urge to shun her reflection may be approached from the aspect of performance and appearance as well. Her complexion as a cultural or racial marker makes her sense her ‘freakery’ (Thomson) skin-deep and thus something she could shed, slither out of, exchanging brown for pink, visibility for invisibility. What she hopes not to see in the mirror, then, is what Rosemarie Garland Thomson refers to as “the anomalous body” (2), singular and extraordinary.⁶⁹ According to Thomson, the anomalous or monstrous is generally viewed as abnormal and intolerable, “demanding genetic reconstruction, surgical normalization, therapeutic elimination, or relegation to pathological specimen” (4). Meena’s sense of being a freak may entail the fear of becoming a spectacle such as a performer in a freak-show (hence her desire to become invisible), as well as the sense of an abnormal condition that can only be done away with by metamorphosis, a metaphorical rebirth. However, her longing to create a

⁶⁸ In “Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia” Caillois studies mimicry among animals (mainly insects) and suggests that in certain cases the animal’s imitative acts are not only performed as camouflage in order to protect itself, but also as a desire for self-erasure. Caillois then aligns this mimicry with psychasthenic psychology, a “disorder in the relationship between personality and space” (100), a certain Freudian death drive that eventually results in the person’s dissolution in its surrounding space.

⁶⁹ According to Thomson, throughout the centuries the perception of the anomalous body has changed from the “the prodigious monster” to “the fanciful freak, the strange and subtle curiosity of nature” (especially “the alien races of distant geographies, particularly those of ‘The East’” [3] in medieval times) and to the exhibits of freak shows in the Victorian era that gave way to the public ritual of “the collective act of looking” (4). As Thomson contends, “the spectacle of the extraordinary body stimulated curiosity, ignited speculation, provoked titillation, furnished novelty, filled coffers, confirmed commonality, and certified national identity” (4).

different identity for herself would mean exchanging one performance for another, this time trying to conform to dominant discourses on the body, which she hopes to achieve through identity performance and mimicry.

The only possible way to fit in, Meena believes, is to become friends with and imitate the local bad girl, Anita Rutter, the embodiment of everything Meena wants to be but is not. Hence Meena engages in constant role-play, a performance of a constructed identity – in her own eyes, she is not the freakish Indian girl any more, but a real Tollington “wench.” Her behaviour and role-play (involving fantasies and lies) point to the concept of performances as events that “mark and bend identities, remake time and adorn and reshape the body, tell stories and allow people to play with behaviour that is restored or ‘twice-behaved’” (Schechner 361). What follows, in Leila Neti’s view, is that “a fantasy personal history emerges” to provide a basis for Meena’s constructed identity, “which in its self-conscious constructedness betrays an element of what Bhabha calls the ambivalence of the mimic man” (105). Applying Bhabha’s concept to postcolonial subjectivities, whose mimicry I perceive as a form of identity performance, I suggest that Meena’s “fantasy personal history” is ambivalent because it signals a desire to operate successfully both in the white and the diaspora community. This desire, however, is doomed to remain unfulfilled, because its duality makes both histories and identities necessarily unfinished and fractured. Longing to gain an insider status in the village, Meena applies mimicry in terms of her looks, behaviour and language, thus performing her identity as one of the local children, even if this involves the use of improper words, deceit or violence. Although she appears to be a ‘master’ of distortion and deception, eventually she grows tired of “the expected Tollington stance” of “attack being the best form of defence” (AM 52) and also fails at successfully imitating Anita and becoming a solid member of her group.

Syal’s characterisation of Meena as a mimic is perhaps at its best when it comes to linguistic performance. On one occasion when Meena drives to town with her mother and they find themselves in an awkward traffic situation, she performs a “deliberately exaggerated Tollington accent, thus proving [she] was very much one of them” (AM 97). Meena’s linguistic performance of “that broad Midland sing-song” (AM 19) implies that she strives to assert her local identity to people outside the village, that is, she prioritises her locality over her cultural identity inasmuch as she loses “her cultural and linguistic ‘idiom’ in order to belong” (Neti 105). Furthermore, the exaggeration of her local accent denotes mimicry as a strategy of survival: she emphasises the local identity she continuously performs and desires,

a 'made-up' identity which she hopes to get a sense of belonging from and which she believes could grant her acceptance. Nevertheless, Meena's verbal mimicry or performance in this particular case is overruled by her visible difference and so it does not save her from being perceived as a "bloody stupid wog" (AM 97). The reason for this utter and humiliating failure lies in Meena's complexion as a racial and cultural marker: the old lady perceives Meena's performance as mimicry and the young girl as a transgressive, threatening mimicry subject. The more Meena has mastered the cultural markers of English (local) identity, the more threatening she becomes in the lady's eyes: her mimicry appears to be a flawed, misshapen mirror image of Englishness, a repetition with a difference, since, as Bhabha claims, the "desire to emerge as 'authentic' through mimicry" necessarily leads to a "partial representation" (*Location* 88). Reading Meena's mimicry in terms of Bhabha's notion of colonial mimicry suggests that her failure is unavoidable, since for the coloniser (here, the old English lady) who produced his (her) 'mirror image' in the colonised subject (Meena), mimicry as imitation becomes a horrifying experience of seeing one's presence (language, stance, behaviour etc.) reflected in a *black* body. In this episode, for the racist consciousness, the irreducible fact of the black body overrules the most accomplished and itchy-perfect verbal mimicry. What follows is that no matter how perfect or exaggerated Meena's Tollington accent may be, her complexion 'overwrites' her linguistic performance and transforms her speech habits (after all, she *is* a Tollington wench) into a textbook case of mimicry that is necessarily partial and disturbing. Thus, although her performance is intended to confirm her identity as a local, she is perceived not only as a "wog" but a 'wog with a Tollington accent,' that is, she becomes a performer in a freak show yet again.

Another fascinating aspect of the use of language for identity performance and its interconnectedness with performativity and mimicry is that it may in fact both imply sameness and difference. Meena's Tollington accent may be interpreted as performative behaviour highlighting her sameness and insider status in the community on the basis of a shared linguistic feature, since, as Leila Neti notes, "speech marked with a nonlocal accent or inflection can demarcate otherness; but locally accented speech can also articulate belonging" (99). On the other hand, when Meena sings a Punjabi song with a Birmingham accent at Papa's *mehfil*, it is something that marks her out and designates as different from or other within the diasporic community, because her performance positions her as English, as opposed to the elders' presumed Indianness. In my view, Meena's 'Englishness,' as manifested in her language, indicates a Butlerian performativity: her performance constructs

“the identity it is purported to be” (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 25) and suggests that “identities are not reducible to what is visible, what is seen on the body, but, rather, that they are constructed by the ‘very “expressions” that are said to be [their] results”” (Butler [45] qtd. in Fortier, *Migrant* 6). The same scene also signals that Meena’s mimicry is an imitation without understanding: the adults find her performance “sweetly done” but are soon shocked when she adds in Anita’s style: “It’s my all time favourite song at the moment ... It’s so brilliant I could shag the arse off it” (AM 115). By using the obscene expression to show off, without knowing what it really means, Meena reveals her ‘imperfect Englishness’ and her identity as always already other – differing both from that of the English and the Indian community.

Indeed, through a series of events Meena is forced to question the price of her Englishness and the value of belonging to Anita’s group and the white community; she has to rethink where her “divided loyalties really lay” (AM 150), and eventually learns to acknowledge and appreciate her roots – thus she can finally own up to her difference. When Meena confronts Sam Lowbridge (her secret love interest and local bad-boy) about his racist behaviour and “Paki bashing,” he tries to defend himself saying “I never meant you, Meena! It was all the others not yow!” (AM 313) By replying “I *am* the others” (AM 314) [original emphasis], Meena identifies herself as Indian, a member of the diasporic community and by doing so she reverses the us/them dichotomy of the dominant discourse – she excludes Sam and makes *him* the other. This assertion is especially noteworthy from the aspect of both Butlerian performativity and Bhabhaian mimicry, drawing attention to the subversiveness that both concepts may involve and that Meena finally realises to be her own.

Meena’s identity formation is a slow and painful process of metamorphosis, and it involves realising how futile her mimicry and identity performances have been: “After so long of living in the dusk where my fantasies almost met reality, where longings could become possibilities ... I was having to learn the difference between acting and being – and it hurt” (AM 289). Having inhabited “a space between perception and performance” (Neti 108) for far too long, Meena finally lets go of identity performance and embraces her racialized, hybrid and fluid identity:

I was content ... I now knew I was not a bad girl, a mixed-up girl, a girl with no name or place. The place in which I belonged was wherever I stood and there was nothing stopping me simply moving forward and claiming each resting place as home.⁷⁰ This

⁷⁰ Meena’s stance here points to a diasporic female nomadism that I shall examine in detail in Chapter 3.

sense of displacement I had always carried round like a curse shrivelled into insignificance ... I would not mourn too much the changing landscape around me, because I would be a traveller soon ... It was time to let go and I floated back down into my body which, for the first time ever, fitted me to perfection and was all mine. (AM 303-4, 326)

Perhaps the most striking aspect of Meena's 'awakening' is that the changes in her self-perception correspond to her changing sense of the body, as she experiences a new identity through her body. Instead of the anomalous, monstrous body that she wished to be invisible, Meena claims to have a perfect body that is entirely her own – this bodily sensation (and the simultaneous spiritual experience) may signal a symbolic return to the mirror phase with its control, "ideality and integrity" (Butler, *Bodies* 43). Nonetheless, it is difficult not to recall Butler's words here, calling attention to the paradox of bodily autonomy: "[M]y body is and is not mine. Given over from the start to the world of others, bearing their imprint, formed within the crucible of social life, the body is only later, and with some uncertainty, that to which I lay claim as my own" (*Undoing Gender* 21). Indeed, being exceptional (i.e. different from that of the average English citizen), Meena's body may always already be marked not only racially and culturally but also socially and as gendered, and thus may not be exclusively hers *per se*; yet, the assertion of the perfectness (as opposed to monstrosity) and possession (as opposed to the denying and 'shedding') of this body points emphatically to both the second half of Butler's statement – laying claim to the body as *her* own – and to the acknowledgement of the complexity and subversiveness of the body, which Rosi Braidotti explains as follows: "[T]his piece of flesh called my 'body', this aching meat called my 'self' expresses the abject/divine potency of a Life which consciousness lives in fear of" (*Metamorphoses* 132).

From the point of view of the diaspora, the quotation is also important for linking education and metamorphosis. The Kumars plan to leave Tollington for Wolverhampton as soon as Meena passes her exams and is admitted to a good school there; thence their migratory journey may continue with "this next reincarnation in our English life cycle"⁷¹ (AM

⁷¹ The narrator here suggests that poverty and racism may be escaped via education. Although Enoch Powell's infamous "Rivers of Blood" speech is briefly mentioned, the novel's representation of racism does not provide a complete picture of the general atmosphere towards immigrants in the 1960s. As Sarah Upstone notes, there may have been immigrants to get and profit from educational opportunities, but "these did not largely allow them to escape prejudice, but rather only to encounter similar attitudes again, only transformed into a more subtle and eloquent racist discourse" (*British Asian* 127).

327), offering Meena a chance to embrace her fluid identity at more enabling locations. Besides, Syal calls attention to the ways the metamorphoses of space and identity may intertwine by portraying Meena's identity formation parallelly with the changes in the life of the family, as well as with the transformation of Tollington itself.

With the construction of the new motorway the village turns into a suburban area, which Meena comments in the following way: "I saw that Tollington lost all its edges and ... that my village was indistinguishable from the suburban mass that had once surrounded it and had finally swallowed it whole" (AM 326). In Procter's opinion Tollington has always already been a suburb of Wolverhampton, and its inhabitants a "semi-rural ... 'yokel' community that shuns the advances of the city, but that achieves its rusticity through what ... is an increasingly cosmetic, and racialised, appeal to the past and pastoral" (*Dwelling Places* 139). The most provocative aspect of this interpretation is that it suggests the performative nature of the English countryside itself and the rustic behaviour of the people claiming to be 'from and of' the country. Their performance is highly ethnic, racial and even imperial, as it strives to keep up the facade of the rural idyll and Englishness of the countryside that lies at the alleged core of English identity 'untouched' by and *vis-à-vis* imperial identity. Tollington's 'made-up' rusticity also points to Sarah Neal's claim that rural spaces provide "ever enticing ways in which to see and experience what we imagine to be the antithesis of the precarious, uncertain, fearful, in flux, grand scale, individualised social worlds and urban environments" (134). The prospect of urbanisation and modernisation appears to be so frightening that the community can only face it by becoming more aggressive and hostile to anything and anyone different, in order to preserve the land and the past as "pure, uncontaminated" (Procter, *Dwelling Places* 140). The transformation of village space thus affects the inhabitants' attitude to and perception of strangers and themselves alike, while "all these metamorphoses" (AM 302) become significant factors in Meena's identity formation and gradual detachment from the village as a cultural space and private place; as she admits: "I wondered if Tollington would ever truly be my home again" (AM 275).

In *Anita and Me* the metaphor of metamorphosis appears on multiple levels, denoting the identity formation of both individual and collective diasporic subjectivity, and pointing to spatial and social processes simultaneously generated by and generating change. By repeatedly emphasising Meena's physical sensation and mental perception of her body, Syal suggests that cultural transformation is also inscribed on the body; by depicting cultural and

physical alteration and spatial transformation as parallel processes, she emphasises the fluidity of both identity and space. In my view, metamorphosis as portrayed by the novel is the manifestation of fluidity, and Deleuze and Guattari's notion of becoming as deterritorialization, "creation" (106) and a "multiplicity ... continually transforming itself into a string of other multiplicities" (249). These perpetually transforming multiplicities are most emphatically manifested in the numerous ways of (self-) identification, positionality and performances of both the cultural space of Tollington and the protagonist. Far more than merely a coming-of-age story and a *Bildungsroman*, *Anita and Me* portrays the interconnectedness of space and self and their mutual impact on each other. The impressions and influences, then, result in multiple ways of metamorphosis (transformation, interchange and conversion), the unceasing construction and reconstruction of space and self: the way rural space turns into a bicultural space and finally a hybrid suburban space; the formation of a diaspora community from strangers in the street acknowledging their being "two rare species ... vaguely related" (*AM* 26) to an extended family and a diasporic community; the construction of the second generation's identity as hybrid, metamorphic and fluid.

The Black Album

Similarly to Meena, Shahid Hasan, the protagonist of *The Black Album*, is born and brought up in a predominantly white English cultural space, in Sevenoaks, Kent. However, while Syal offers a thorough description of Tollington, the primary location and generator of Meena's in-betweenness and identity crisis, Kureishi reserves little space in his novel for the portrayal of rural England, emphasising Shahid's identity formation in, and his relationship to, the urban space of London. Another major difference between the two novels is that although both protagonists are second-generation immigrants, their cultural backgrounds are considerably different, particularly in view of their connection to their diaspora. While Meena is surrounded by an extended family and is thus brought up in an ethnic environment where preserving culture is of crucial importance, Shahid's only link to the 'homeland' is his immediate family, who in fact appear to be very much uprooted and characterised by a Weilian rootlessness in England: they do not make friends with fellow immigrants, follow any religious or cultural practices, or display any wish whatsoever to return to their roots/homeland permanently. Therefore, it is in the multicultural space of London that Shahid can personally get back in touch with his roots, and that he finds himself torn between two

opposing ways of self-identification: music and ethnicity, pop culture and religion. My analysis of his identity formation and *Bildung* focuses on this binary.

Kureishi's second novel is a coming-of-age story⁷² and a condition of England novel (Cf. Moore-Gilbert 143), reflecting on national identity and the state of Thatcherite England at the end of the 1980s, and exploring the notions of belonging, in-betweenness and the crisis of cultural identity in the lives of young second-generation diaspora subjects in this political period. While *Maps for Lost Lovers* portrays closely-knit immigrant communities rejecting assimilation and hybridization, and *Anita and Me* focuses on the creation of extended families, which preserve their cultural roots by collective performances of identity, *The Black Album* depicts one British-Pakistani family, which is well-assimilated and integrated into British society and forms part of an emerging British Asian middle class, which abandons its cultural roots for the sake of financial success and prosperity in the host country, thereby going through a process of uprooting and Westernisation. As the first generation that Kureishi depicts become entrepreneurial diaspora subjects – materialistic, assimilated and atheist –, the second generation find themselves in a cultural void, which they attempt to fight with Western hedonism or religious fundamentalism.

Situatedness and identity crisis

Although most of the narrative takes place in London, through Shahid's focalization we also get a glimpse of life in the English countryside. The 'original' location and starting point of his identity formation is rural Kent, an atypical place of residence for the South Asian diaspora but an enabling locale⁷³ for the entrepreneurial diaspora subject. In Sevenoaks the Hasan family make a living by running a travel agency, using its wealth to assimilate and integrate into white England and its Western (suburban⁷⁴) values, a goal exemplified by the description of the home:

Their family house was an immaculate 1960s mansion, just outside the town, a caravanserai, as filled with people as a busy hotel. Papa had constantly redecorated it,

⁷² The novel may also be termed an ethnic Bildungsroman, along with Kureishi's first novel, *The Buddha of Suburbia*, and Syal's *Anita and Me*.

⁷³ In human geography locales are physical settings for interaction; Anthony Giddens, for example, defines them as "physical settings associated with the 'typical interactions' composing ... collectivities as social systems," and may range from one's dwelling to empires (39).

⁷⁴ For various theories of the suburb and suburban values, see my analysis of Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* in chapter 2.

the furniture was replaced every five years and new rooms were necessarily added ... Papa hated anything 'old-fashioned', unless it charmed tourists. He wanted to tear down the old; he liked 'progress'. 'I only want the best,' he'd say, meaning the newest, the latest, and, somehow, the most ostentatious. (BA 39)

The father's desire to "tear down the old" implies his wish to uproot himself and leave his past (home and culture) behind. As a Thatcherite, he is characterised by a "philosophy of individualism and self-advancement" (Gunnig 74) while as an assimilated immigrant he displays a lack of homing desire (Brah 193) or nostalgia for his lost home in Pakistan,⁷⁵ which he feels farther and farther away from each time he revisits it: "The place enraged him: the religion shoved down everyone's throats; the bandits, corruption, censorship, laziness, fatuity of the press; the holes in the roads, the absence of roads, the roads on fire. Nothing was ever right for Papa there. He liked to say, when he was at his most depressed, that the British shouldn't have left' (BA 107).

Papa's anglophilia and Thatcherism are also inherited by his elder son, Chili, who, however, embodies a certain "Thatcherite grotesque," offering "a metonymy of a society in severe and possibly irreversible decline" (Gunnig 74). Chili's increasing greed and drug addiction eventually result in the father's dream and expectations becoming "shipwrecked" (BA 199): Chili loses his family, the business and control over his life. Although he has "a looser attitude" (BA 7), he frequently poses as Shahid's "reality guide" (BA 42) in terms of material and bodily pleasures, enabled by a working knowledge of entrepreneurial England and his 'all Westernized' attitude and looks: "Chili drank only black coffee and neat Jack Daniels; his suits were Boss, his underwear Calvin Klein, his actor Pacino. His barber shook his hand, his accountant took him to dinner, his drug dealer would come to him at all hours, and accept his cheques" (BA 38).

⁷⁵ In *South Asian Writers in Twentieth-Century Britain* Ruvani Ranasinha points out that Kureishi's model for the Hasan family was in fact provided by his own family, settled in white suburban Kent and isolated from Pakistani diasporic communities (Cf. 230). Similarly to the Hassans, his family did not speak Urdu at home and had no cultural expectations from the children. In fact, Kureishi even described his family as Anglophile and his upbringing as mono-cultural: "I was brought up really as an English child ... my father was very Westernized – he wasn't a practising Muslim, for example, he didn't believe in arranged marriages or practices that would have conflicted with what was around us. I wasn't influenced by Asian culture at all" (Kureishi qtd. in Miller 16). Kureishi's upbringing served as a model for not only Shahid's but also Karim's figure in his semi-autobiographical novel, *The Buddha of Suburbia*" (Ranasinha, *South Asian* 230-1).

Although Shahid cannot identify with his yuppie brother⁷⁶ and his family's Thatcherite values, he nevertheless tries to internalise their work ethics, "attempting to do something well, to the limit of his ability, on his own terms" (*BA* 147-8). Western work ethics is the basis of the Hasan family, privileged in the upbringing and education of the children: "At home Papa liked to say, when asked about his faith, 'Yes, I have a belief. It's called working until my arse aches!' Shahid and Chili had been taught little about religion" (*BA* 92). Apparently, culture and religion are both neglected in the household, being the alleged causes of poverty, turmoil and an unliveable life back in Pakistan. Nevertheless, while the parents strive to break away from their home country, they remain very much situated in it; Shahid and Chili, on the other hand, have their roots in Kent and are firmly situated in English culture – or, from another perspective, they display a facticity in relation to a cultureless, non-religious, capitalist version of British-Asianness with its freedom of choice and control over one's fate.⁷⁷ This alternative diasporic identity is in sharp contrast with that of the Pakistani immigrants in Aslam's novel – there is no diaspora or extended family providing the family with cultural reference points and a sense of belonging, no religious rules to guide their lives and hinder their Westernisation, no immigrant ghetto (either mental or physical) to confine them or to allow them to keep themselves to themselves.

Nonetheless, Shahid perceives Sevenoaks as an equally and increasingly confining location that does not enable him to live on his own terms. His facticity – his situatedness in the countryside – is both a natural and a stifling condition, since being a young man with artistic ambitions (he is an aspiring writer), he is frightened by the lack of culture and prospects in the countryside: "At home he still had a few school friends ... Almost all were unemployed. And their parents, usually patriotic people and proud of the Union Jack, knew nothing of their own culture. Few of them even had books in their houses" (*BA* 26-7). It is significant that the oppressive nature of his domestic environment is not defined in ethnic terms; in the above sentence, "their own culture" refers to British-English culture, defining his parents as middlebrow suburban petty bourgeois people rather than on the basis of their ethnic provenance. While after the death of his father Shahid experiences his home as "cruelly anarchic" (*BA* 26), Sevenoaks seems to be fixed in suburban conventions and ignorance. It is

⁷⁶ Although Chili "travels a trajectory through a number of positions" (Gunnig 75) in the narrative, which may provide an example for Shahid's shifting identity positions and construction of a multiple positionality, for Shahid he is first and foremost "a model in how not to live" (*BA* 249).

⁷⁷ One example of the hybridized, Westernised British-Asianness that Kureishi depicts here is when the family does not demand an arranged marriage for Shahid or even a love marriage when he gets his girlfriend pregnant, but give him money to pay for her abortion.

probably the cultureless and thruster nature of his immediate surroundings and white rural England as he knows it that makes Shahid turn to literature in the first place:

[M]y parents forced me to work with them ... But instead of sending people to Ibiza I sat in the back office reading Malcolm X and Maya Angelou and the *Souls of Black Folk*. I read about the Mutiny and Partition and Mountbatten. And one morning I started reading *Midnight's Children* in bed ... Then I saw the author on television attacking racism, informing the people how it all arose. I tell you, I wanted to cheer. But it made me feel worse, because I was finally recognizing something. I began to get terrible feelings in my head ... I thought I was going mad ... I began to feel ... in that part of the country, more of a freak than I did normally. (BA 9-10)

Shahid, who was completely ignorant of his 'black' roots up to this point, starts reading literature about racism, the history of the subcontinent – that is, his is a reading based on identity politics. He seems to choose his readings consciously, not restricted to his parents' cultural background but encompassing black literature on racism and minority identity, books which a liberal white intellectual family (such as the Chalfens in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*) would read. His desire for culture, then, is also a desire for a cultural self-definition that would mark him as different from the bland cultural identity of his family: he is exploring 'black' culture, which he starts reading as an outsider but gradually realises to be his own, which may generate a longing to connect to his parents' forgotten roots and the present condition and position of 'the black subject,' but also, quite contradictorily, to the feeling of being an outsider in more ways than one, being a "freak" in a white country. As Maria Degabriele points out, the texts Shahid reads trigger an "emerging sense of identity that stands in difference from and resistance to the dominant White English culture" (para 2). However, the realisation of his racial identity and his marginalised status as the child of migrants goes hand in hand with abhorring his irremediable difference, with its implications in his perception by others, and results in a crisis of cultural identity, rootlessness and a sense of unbelonging:

I kept thinking there was something I lacked ... Everywhere I went I was the only dark-skinned person. How did this make people see me? I began to be scared of going into certain places. I didn't know what they were thinking. I was convinced they were full of sneering and disgust and hatred. And if they were pleasant, I imagined they

were hypocrites. I became paranoid. I couldn't go out. I knew I was confused and ... fucked up. But I didn't know what to do. (BA 10)

It is interesting to compare Shahid's sense of being a freak and his fear of places with Meena's "freakery" and avoidance of (physical and metaphorical) mirrors (Cf. AM 149-50). For Meena this condition is first and foremost experienced on a physiological level, as an individual and innate freakishness, and results in a sense of disunity and self-hatred – wishing for a body without a mirror image. Shahid similarly goes through a 'reversed' Lacanian mirror stage as he loses control over his (self-) perception. By identifying with Malcolm X's and Angelou's otherness in dominant discourse, Shahid begins to perceive himself as a freak, as other in his native location, i.e., as opposed to Meena, his freakishness is manifested mainly on a spatial level, as he allows his readings to alter his self-image and sense of place. What I mean here is that Shahid's otherness is not primarily produced by place or space (in this case 'white' rural England), because the feeling of otherness would not be possible without a 'human quotient' – a sense of the body and the sense of self in a Lacanian sense. Nonetheless, otherness has vital spatial connotations: for both Shahid and Meena, self-image and identity are determined largely by their location and sense of place. Influenced by his readings and the 'cultural awakening' they generate, as well as by his (real and imaginary) social relationships in his native town, Shahid's sense of otherness, like Meena's, is partly self-imposed. The distorted picture Shahid believes to see as reflected in the mirror of other people's eyes is a distorted self-image that he projects onto others' behaviour. His otherness, then, comes not only from the outside but also from the inside; it is both constructed by social processes and is a recently realised, self-induced feeling of being other, "internalized within the self" (Harvey, "Class Relations" 57-8).

Furthermore, Shahid's self-image is not only distorted but also fragmented or split, as a result of his realisation that despite being a local, a *native* in a mainly white space, he experiences (or fears to experience) racial discrimination and abuse. Although like the Kumars in *Anita and Me*, the Hasans appear to be well-integrated in dominant society and accepted as members of the local community, that is, they are not perceived as aliens in the countryside, Shahid comes to view himself as an *alien* in his birthplace, rootless, unbelonging, out of place. While for Meena the presence of the extended family and their collective cultural practices may provide roots to belong to, Shahid can only rely on his readings for a chance of (re-)rooting. Despite this difference, however, both characters lack a

sense of belonging and in order to resolve their identity crisis they both resort to mimicry. Meena's mimicry is mainly verbal, and is restricted to the imitation of one particular person; Shahid strives to become more like 'all' the white English in terms of their attitude to the racial other like himself:

I wanted to be a racist. My mind was invaded by killing-nigger fantasies ... Of going around abusing Pakis, niggers, Chinks, Irish, any foreign scum. I slagged them under my breath whenever I saw them. I wanted to kick them up the arse. The thought of sleeping with Asian girls made me sick ... Even when they came on to me, I couldn't bear it. I thought, you know, wink at an Asian girl and she'll want to marry you up. I wouldn't touch brown flesh, except with a branding iron. I hated all foreign bastards ... I argued...why can't I be a racist like everyone else? Why do I have to miss out on that privilege? Why is it only me who has to be good? Why can't I swagger around pissing on others for being inferior? I began to turn into one of them. I was becoming a monster. (BA 10-11)

The most thought-provoking aspect of Shahid's metamorphosis from 'other' (being a freak) to racist (being a monster) is that it entails a Bhabhaian mimicry without understanding; he copies white English racists – their discourse, stereotyping behaviour and fear of abjection – not because he shares their hatred, but because he perceives it as a sign of privilege. Although some irony can be sensed in this posterior confession, his words suggest that back then he perceived hatred as something that could get him closer to valuing himself and being accepted. Furthermore, while Meena reacts to othering by yearning for whiteness and wanting to shed her skin, i.e., she internalises her otherness, Shahid admits no desire to change his complexion but exteriorises and projects his self-hatred to fellow 'blacks,' wanting to punish them for his own stigma of being other in the white country, for "the 'Other-ness' of the Self inscribed in the perverse palimpsest of [post-] colonial identity" (Bhabha, "Foreword" xxvii).

Shahid's behaviour recalls Frantz Fanon's account of self-hatred, described in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) as an awareness of his blackness: when a young child in Paris points out Fanon's skin colour, saying "Look, a Negro" (84), Fanon reacts in the following way: "I took myself far off ... and made myself an object. What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood" (85). According to Pal Ahluwalia, what Fanon experiences here is being "disempowered by nausea;" it is "the recognition of being trapped, injured" and lacking "the possibility to break

out of that condition” (344-5).⁷⁸ Ahluwalia likens Fanon’s emerging sense of self-hatred for being black to Sartre’s concept of nausea (a term Fanon also uses in describing the scene [*Black Skin* 84]), which is “the realization of one’s racial identity, but also a realization that this racial identity is a source of trauma, shame and oppression. It is the intense self-dislike that is born out of this realization” (Nayar 34).

Shahid attempts to fight self-hatred by becoming a racist, projecting his self-hatred to fellow minority subjects, and also performing a strong and deliberate version of Bhabhaian mimicry – hating blacks like whites do. In other words, he mimics “the febrile, fantasmatic images of racial hatred that come to be absorbed and acted out in the wisdom of the West” (Bhabha, “Foreword” xxvii), and underlines Fanon’s claim about self-hatred generated by racial conflicts in segregated societies (or, in *The Black Album*, in an almost exclusively white cultural space): “You are forced to come up against yourself” (*Wretched* 307). What Fanon describes here is not only colour prejudice (Cf. Burns, 1984) but a deep-rooted hatred, which is not “inborn” but “has to be constantly cultivated, to be brought into being, in conflict with more or less recognized guilt complexes. Hate demands existence, and he who hates has to show his hate in appropriate actions and behavior; in a sense, he has to become hate” (*Black Skin* 37). In my view, Shahid’s racism is the manifestation of the second-generation immigrant’s crisis of dual identity, which we have also seen in the characters of Meena and the second generation in *Maps*, and which is generated by facticity, by being located in this situation⁷⁹ and by Shahid’s very situatedness in this location. Owing to his complexion and the otherness associated with it, Shahid perceives his hometown as an offensive, narrow and limited place which cannot offer him either a sense of belonging or sense of freedom but compels him to transgress its metaphorical and physical boundaries, and drives him away to another, more promising and enabling place: London.

Alternative ways of belonging and sensing place

Shahid’s admitted reasons to move to London are “to distance himself from the family and also to think about their lives and why they had come to England” (*BA* 7), which may be

⁷⁸ Fanon’s experience described here is a recurring trope in postcolonial literature; see, for instance, Sam Selvon’s *Lonely Londoners* (1956) and Caryl Phillips’s *The Final Passage* (1985).

⁷⁹ According to Pile, “the self is always located within a situation” and its situation is “profoundly geographical” (54). This phenomenon is one of the main claims of the sociological school of symbolic interactionism, which emphasises “the way in which individuals construct, and subsequently maintain, their self-images” (53).

interpreted as ambivalent attempts at both uprooting and rerooting. Besides, in the ‘promised land’ of the capital, Shahid longs to be “challenged intellectually, and in every other way” (BA 5), and to surround himself with literature and music; as he says, “desultory reading was his greatest pleasure, with interruptions for pop records. He had moved from book to book as on stepping stones, both for fun and out of fear of being with people who had knowledge which might exclude him” (BA 20). Hoping to use knowledge as a means of becoming an insider is yet another example of mimicry (a peaceful alternative for his role-play as a racist), which might provide him with the necessary qualities to fit in. To succeed in his intellectual mimicry, Shahid chooses a college in Kilburn, where he could learn from Professor Deedee Osgood, a liberal “postmodern type,” who encourages her students “to study anything that took their interest, from Madonna’s hair to a history of the leather jacket’ (BA 26). Nevertheless, instead of a fresh start, the college proves to be yet another marker of his situatedness, this time in terms of race: “The college was a cramped Victorian building ... It was sixty per cent black and Asian ... Its reputation was less in the academic area but more for gang rivalries, drugs, thieving and political violence. It was said that college reunions were held in Wandsworth Prison” (BA 24). Becoming a student here may even aggravate Shahid’s feelings of otherness and social exclusion (Cf. Moore-Gilbert 145), since his location situates him not in the position of a young British man from Kent, but as the member of an ethnic minority coming from the subcontinent.

Shahid’s London (or at least the ethnically mixed area of Kilburn) is in sharp contrast with both “the whole Orwellian idea of England” (BA 106), which Kent may embody, and the vivid, enabling “postmodern space” (Clement Ball, “Semi-Detached” 23) that Kureishi is praised for portraying (most notably in *The Buddha of Suburbia*). As Shahid remarks on “the broken glass beneath his feet” while he walks along “streets of deserted burger bars, kebab houses and shuttered shops,” which mock “anyone who’d contrived no escape” (BA 16), London appears as downtrodden and hopeless, less a hybrid than simply a multi-ethnic place:

He had noticed during the days that he’d walked round the area, that the races were divided. The black kids stuck with each other, the Pakistanis went to one another’s houses, the Bengalis knew each other from way back, and the whites too. Even if there was no hostility between groups – and there was plenty ... – there was little mixing. And would things change? Why should they? A few individuals would make the

effort, but wasn't the world breaking up into political and religious tribes? The divisions were taken for granted, each to his own. (BA 133-4)

Shahid's observations echo Aslam's representation of diaspora space divided on the basis of ethnicity, religion or kinship, and draw attention to the fragmentation and heterogeneity of the South Asian diaspora as manifested in communal and spatial division. In Bart Moore-Gilbert's opinion, the "increasing polarisation and hostility in society at large is mirrored in the gangs which roam Shahid's college, which is the site of endemic conflict" (146), just like Kilburn and, by extension, multiethnic London. Theoretically, Shahid is intimidated by this polarisation and despises the idea of "political and religious tribes" (BA 134) – in effect, he is somewhat confused and directionless,⁸⁰ not even sure whether he is actually searching for something or not (BA 5). Eventually, his need for a sense of belonging, which has drawn him to London in the first place, proves to be stronger than his disapproval and propels him to seek "interesting Asian companions" (BA 15).

Upon his arrival in London, Shahid longs for "a new start with new people in a new place," and hopes that the city "would feel like this; he wouldn't be excluded; there had to be ways in which he could belong" (BA 16); that is, he is looking for belonging both in a location and to people. The novel portrays two possible ways of achieving a sense of belonging: one on a religious/ethnic level and another on an emotional/sexual level. The former is offered by Riaz and his group of young Muslims, who seem to understand Shahid's past and identity crisis, and whose cultural purity is manifested in their religious beliefs and stable cultural identity that Shahid knows very little about: "Shahid was afraid that his ignorance would place him in no man's land. These days everyone was insisting on their identity, coming out as a man, woman, gay, black, Jew – brandishing on whichever features they would claim, as if without a tag they wouldn't be human. Shahid, too, wanted to belong to his people" (BA 92). Apparently, Kureishi presents Shahid as identifying being human not with constant change (metamorphosis) but with having a fixed and singular cultural identity, a sense of belonging to a certain culture (stasis). Thus, before he knows it, Shahid gets involved in the gang's political and religious crusade. Although brought up to be an atheist and having no inclination for politics, he is grateful for becoming part of a community: "Riaz and Hat and Chad were

⁸⁰ Shahid's hesitation concerning his directionlessness is only slightly altered later on in the novel – after he has met the group and Deedee and is thus offered two directions to make a move in, he identifies the need for direction but cannot locate the direction itself: as he says, he is determined to "find his own direction, whatever that was" (BA 76).

the first people he'd met who were like him, he didn't have to explain anything. Chad trusted him. Hat had called him brother. He was closer to this gang than he was to his own family" (BA 57). By belonging to Riaz's 'extended family,' Shahid finally feels that he has become one of 'us,' not one of 'them,' someone who belongs, not one who is excluded, not an in-between but decidedly one pole of the dichotomy.

The feeling of being with "his people" (BA 125), being "one with the regiment of brothers and sisters" (BA 83) seems to satisfy Shahid's yearning for belonging and a fixed identity. As he sets out to define his own cultural identity, he gradually finds a way to communality and diaspora, the "living, breathing history of struggle" (BA 27), helping him combat the feeling of isolation and otherness, as well as to spirituality, counterbalancing the materialism that imbued his family's life. On the other hand, the group's religious fervour further intensifies the dichotomy of 'us' versus 'them' and encourages identification on the basis of both sameness (with an ethnic or religious group) and difference⁸¹ (with the people outside this group). In fact, Shahid's position and experience within the group are simultaneously characterised by both, difference seeming to be more emphatic, because Shahid still has to be taught how to pray and 'must' be torn away from his beloved albums and books – the brothers demand that he be deprived of the joy of art and freedom of expression, which to them represent the corruption and promiscuity of the West. It is precisely this conflict, along with Shahid's desire for bodily pleasures, which makes him seek a second, alternative way of belonging, found in the arms of Deedee Osgood.

Being an admirer of music and literature, Deedee understands Shahid intellectually, and after they become lovers, it is she who provides him with the emotional and physical level of belonging through intimacy. Shahid needs Deedee "in ways he didn't understand ... though he could not allow himself to acknowledge this" (BA 104): she challenges and motivates him, encourages his experiments with identity, and embodies a kind of belonging which does not situate Shahid or possess him the way Riaz's group does, but goes hand in hand with a sense of freedom through entertainment, sexuality and drugs experienced at

⁸¹ In an interview with Bronwyn Williams, Kureishi argues that young second-generation British Asians who turn to fundamental Islam do so as "a process of differentiation": "You know? 'We're not gay and we don't like gays. We're not Jews and we don't like Jews. We don't like this and we don't like freedom. We don't like democracy. We don't like this. We don't like that.' So, all the time, sifting through everything, all the notions that we live in all day, as it were, to make up your mind. There was a lot of making up your mind all the time and rejection, 'That's not me. That's not me.' *Asserting the difference*. And, that is quite interesting. After all, there were people who had their difference, as it were, asserted all the time, but society looked right over it. Yet they were continuing to assert their own difference on their own turf which seemed, in perverse[sic] sense, to be an act of freedom" (qtd. in B. Williams, note 2) [my emphasis].

various places. As a self-proclaimed tour guide, Deedee takes Shahid to various places of entertainment, such as the Morlock (the local bar of drug-dealers), an end-of-decade party in the suburbs – a “savage place” with a swinger party (BA 61) – and the White Room. The latter is a silver warehouse railed off by barbed wire so as to resemble a prison yard, inside of which, in “a cavernous room containing at least five hundred people,” there are “shifting coloured slides ... projected on to the walls” and “a relentless whirlwind of interplanetary noises,” keeping the scantily-clad people dance around individually in a trance (BA 59).

Although the White Room is visited almost exclusively by white people (similarly to all the clubs and rave parties the couple haunt) and the name itself has racial connotations, indicating that “racism infects every sector of society” (Moore-Gilbert 146), Kureishi’s portrayal posits it as the reversal of the immigrant ghetto, where it is the white English who are restricted to a narrow place. On the other hand, the sexual and personal freedom experienced within these ‘prison walls’ may be interpreted as the metaphor of Shahid’s free spirit caged by fundamental religion. Despite his visible otherness, Shahid does not feel either excluded or othered, mainly because the spirit of decadence, individuality and freedom overwhelms him, and also for the very reason that being with Deedee grants him a sense of belonging, even in and to these allegedly white cultural places. Another reason why the White Room is a noteworthy location in the novel is that it invites an alternative way of sensing place, not as fixity, stability and attachment, but, through its colours, smells, tastes and sounds, as a sensual spatial experience, multiple, fluid, liberating and directionless in a positive sense. According to Yi-Fu Tuan, music can create spatial illusions and influence a person’s sense of orientation to such an extent that the “idea of a precisely located goal loses relevance ... Music and dance free people from the demands of purposeful goal-directed life, allowing them to live briefly in what Erwin Straus calls ‘presentic’ unoriented space” (*Space and Place* 128-9).

If music relieves the individual from direction and goal, Shahid’s love of music may be perceived as an unconscious desire for a sense of belonging in directionlessness, movement and fluidity, which he is denied as the member of Riaz’s group but appears to find with Deedee. It must be noted, though, that Deedee’s affair with Shahid involves a degree of restriction as well, inasmuch as it evokes certain elements of Orientalism.⁸² As Moore-Gilbert

⁸² Affection or sexual encounter between whites and British Asians is also portrayed in *Maps* (in the relationship of Charag and Stella). In fact, interracial relationships, either real or imagined (as in the case of Meena and Sam), are frequent tropes in contemporary British Asian fiction and film. Examples include Atima Srivastava’s

points out, the affair is characterised by, on one hand, a reversed “gender economy” in which Shahid “glories in his ‘possession’ of Deedee;” on the other hand, it implies an unequal power relation with Deedee “abusing her position of power and knowledge” (150), making Shahid feel controlled and used at times; as he says, “he didn’t like being slotted into her plans, as if he were being hired for a job, the specifications of which she had prepared already” (BA 123). Nevertheless, Shahid is drawn to Deedee because she first and foremost represents liberal values and pop culture,⁸³ the rejection of commitment, gender stereotypes and fixity – with Deedee, everything is in flux and metamorphosis.

Having discovered two contrasting ways of belonging to people, Shahid’s sense of place also assumes a complex, alternative form. He discovers both individuality and non-attachment at places of entertainment, freedom and alienation in the streets of London, and communality and spirituality in the mosque: “Here race and class barriers had been suspended ... There were dozens of languages. Strangers spoke to one another. The atmosphere was uncompetitive, peaceful, meditative ... It was a sharp transition; he found it difficult to reconcile what went on in the mosque with the bustling diversity of the city” (BA 132-3). Despite the obvious differences, the mosque proves to be just as multi-ethnic as London itself, suggesting a postmodern and postcolonial London (and, by extension, Britain) which cannot offer Shahid a “stable culture” (B. Williams, para 36). On the other hand, the peace and serenity Shahid experiences in the mosque is in sharp contrast with the raw physicality of the city, where, “although the secrets of desire were veiled, sexual tension was everywhere ... such allure wasn’t a preliminary to real sex, it was sex itself. Out there it was not innocent” (BA 124). What Shahid juxtaposes here, then, are the innocence and the purity of the spirit and the ‘dirty’ physicality of the body, which may be translated as Kureishi’s portrayal of an idealistic (perhaps even utopian) multiculturalism based on equality and tolerance versus the tensions and atrocities as the reality of the multicultural metropolis.

The lack of ‘innocence’ and communality is also visible in Shahid’s account of the IRA bombing at Victoria. Through this event London increasingly emerges as a place of

Transmission (Angie and Lol), Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia* (Karim and Eleanor, Karim and Charlie), and his film *My Beautiful Laundrette* (Omar and Johnny), Dhaliwal’s *Tourism* (Puppy and Sophie), Saadi’s *Psychoraag* (Zaf and Babs), the so-called Raj films, and the Scottish film *Ae Fond Kiss* (Casim and Roisin), to name but a few.

⁸³ Kureishi tends to use music, and by extension pop culture as a metaphor of hybrid identity, e.g. in the case of *The Buddha*, where Karim’s (and more emphatically Charlie’s) identity formation happens parallel with, and is marked by, changes in the music scene, and identity performances often involve clothes inspired by various forms of music and different artists (e.g. Charlie copying David Bowie and punks).

chaos, an impression enhanced and exaggerated by media coverage, which focuses on the “blood-soiled faces” (BA 102), and which provides an immediate explanation of the events, thereby “robbing viewers of involvement” (BA 103). Interestingly, Shahid wants a first-hand experience of this chaos, since this is the first time that he senses a degree of compassion in the city – people go to the hospitals to give blood and churches open to welcome people who had not entered for ages. What the description of the bombing implies is that such acts of violence may not only be the causes and effects of urban alienation, but at times may become a ‘wake-up call’ for the city dwellers, reminding them of basic human values. Shahid, however, seems to be somewhat sceptical of the turn of events (and hearts), since, as he notes, “[s]uch a tragedy was the closest a city like London could come to communal emotion” (BA 103). His words suggest that not only a diasporic community but also urban society *per se* can be characterised by a Weilian rootlessness. It is no wonder, then, that Shahid seeks a sense of belonging not in place but in human relationships, which, however, involves constant emotional and spatial movement between the two extremes embodied respectively by Deede and the gang. The opposition of the mosque and the city, of religion and sexuality, of communality and alienation, as well as the discrepancies of Shahid’s experiences with regard to them intensify his identity crisis and in-betweenness to such an extent that he resorts to mimicry once again to create a sense (or at least the illusion) of belonging – this time through masquerade and a series of identity performances.

Identity positions and performances of the self

When Chad surprises Shahid with a white cotton *salwar kamiz*, it is a sign that he is finally accepted as one of the brothers, yet he feels “conspicuous in the salwar’s full and comfortable folds” (BA 131). Unable to fully identify with the ‘national dress,’ changing into it is a masquerade to please the gang, an act of mimicry performed in order to fit in, although this time it appears to be a reversed colonial mimicry, since Shahid’s aim is not to look more English, but to imitate fellow Pakistanis – it is a role-play undertaken for a different social position. Nevertheless, similarly to Meena’s use of language, Shahid’s dress-up becomes a “partial representation” (Bhabha, *Location* 88), a flawed mirror image of an alleged cultural identity, the failure of the mimic man, since the *salwar kamiz* neither really fits him nor does it actually help him to fit in. The national clothes can feel “conspicuous,” inadequate to disguise his otherness, in two ways: they cannot hide his Westernised identity and make him

look more Muslim, and when Shahid goes out to the streets in them, they make him feel more visibly different, to the point that he draws a knife to protect himself (BA 134). Furthermore, like Meena's Birmingham accent, Shahid's "drag" may also be interpreted as an instance of Butlerian performativity, purporting a constructed identity, and, if we take the various stages (spaces and places) and audiences of these performances into account, as 'theatrical acts,' evoking Erving Goffman's (1959) theory of performance.

According to Goffman, people unconsciously engage in role-plays or theatre-like performances in their everyday lives, acting, pretending and improvising according to the social situation they find themselves in:

Ordinary social intercourse is itself put together as a scene is put together, by the exchange of dramatically inflated actions, counteractions, and terminating replies. Scripts even in the hands of unpractised players can come to life because life itself is a dramatically enacted thing. All the world is not, of course, a stage, but the crucial ways in which it isn't are not easy to specify. (72)

As Goffman's words imply, there is hardly any situation or aspect of life which is not infiltrated by a performance of the self, which may involve mimicry and masquerade in clothing, behaviour, poise and language. In the light of Goffman's theory, one may view Shahid's *salwar kamiz* as a form of masquerade, a theatrical costume of a performed self. This interpretation evokes the notion of performance as an "imitation or dramaturgical staging" (Denzin 135), in line with Victor Turner's (1974) notion of *social drama*,⁸⁴ where "the crises of everyday life ... exhibit something of the characteristics of theatre" (Loxley 152) – that is, Shahid masks himself to conceal a crisis of identity and to assert his cultural identity and belonging. However, as Fortier points out, "cultural ethnicity may be 'incorporated' through *repeated* performative acts" (*Migrant* 6) [my emphasis], that is, wearing national clothes *once* does not really propel Shahid's construction of cultural identity – it somehow feels wrong, conspicuous, since "identities are not reducible to what is visible" but are "a matter of 'telling' and 'showing' that which cannot be seen" (*Migrant* 6). Shahid's *salwar kamiz*, then, is meant to show a layer of his identity which may not have even been constructed yet, a religious and cultural identity prescribed by his roots but never actually experienced or internalised before. In this respect, Shahid's performance may also be explained by Butler's

⁸⁴ As Loxley notes, for Turner "human life was necessarily performative, in the sense of being a set of active processes" (151), while people were actors in this social drama.

gendered theory of performativity, according to which each performance is at once imitated and original, since, there is no “preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured” (“Performative Acts” 106).⁸⁵ For Shahid, who lacks religious and cultural roots, there is no ‘Muslim self’ to imitate or return to here. In my view, his (as well as Meena’s) mimicry embodies the intersections and correlation of theories of performance and performativity, and Bhabha’s colonial mimicry, and invite the possible interpretation of the postcolonial mimic (wo)man’s identity as necessarily theatrical, positing and positioning diasporians as “persons-as-performers” (Denzin 130).

Apparently, it is the sexually liberal and experimental Deedee who manages to bring Shahid’s ‘hidden’ identities to the surface by masking him as a woman during their love-making: “She ... put on Madonna’s ‘Vogue’ ... She hummed and fussed over him, reddening his lips, darkening his eyelashes, applying blusher, pushing a pencil under his eye. She back-combed his hair. It troubled him, he felt he were [sic] losing himself. What was she seeing?” (BA 117) At first Shahid is frightened by the metamorphosis, since it involves having to “overcome the ‘burden’ of a rigid understanding of masculinity and explore a more feminine gender expression” (Yekani 179). After a while, however, he lets his lover take control and is surprised by the relief he feels: “For now she refused him a mirror, but he liked the feel of his new female face. He could be demure, flirtatious, teasing, a star; a burden went, a certain responsibility had been removed. He even wondered what it might be like to go out as a woman, and be looked at differently” (BA 117-8). Allowing himself to enjoy the experience, Shahid both discovers his feminine side and gets to sneak into the skin of his pop idol, Prince, who is “half black and half white, half man, half woman, half size, feminine but macho too” (BA 25).

It is at this point that the novel’s title, which refers to one of Prince’s albums, reveals its significance: the artist’s multiple and fluid identity, his transgression of the dominant views on subjectivity and gender, make him a role model to Shahid, enabling him, through Deedee’s conduct, to discover and embrace his own multiplicity and fluidity through performance: “It was easier not to resist, even when she had him walking up and down on his toes like a model. Beyond embarrassment, in a walking dance, he swung his hips and arms, throwing his head back, pouting, kicking his legs out, showing her his arse and cock. As he

⁸⁵ Similarly to Butler, Goffman perceives performance as an act of imitation or *mimesis*, and he claims that “aspects of the theatre creep into everyday life” (254). For an overview of the multiple ways in which performance and performativity may be interpreted, see Conquergood (1998).

went she nodded, smiled and sighed” (*BA* 117-8). In Elahe Yekani’s view, although Shahid becomes “the object of his female lover’s gaze” and thereby also part of a reversed gender relation, he eventually “feels relieved from the pressures to match a normative version of masculine sexuality and perceives this exploration of femininity as liberating” (179). For Frederick M. Holmes, Shahid’s dress-up is an experiment with identity, as well as a “reshaping of the self in erotic and artistic play ... the reinvention of identity” (306-7). Holmes’s claim implies an alternative way of identity construction; for me, Shahid’s identity performances as a woman and a Muslim are variations on metamorphosis, and indicate the manifestation of an identity in flux, in transition, in positionality, which points to Susan Stanford Friedman’s concept of relational positionality. Friedman’s notion acknowledges the various racial and ethnic standpoints of the sexes and calls for the dissolution of “the fixities of the white/other binary” (47), whereby “[s]cripts of relational positionality construct a multiplicity of fluid identities defined and acting situationally” (47) (as opposed to geographically or ethnically), i.e. identities which shift “fluidly from setting to setting” (23), “with a changing context, depending always upon the point of reference” (47). When Shahid ‘wears’ different identities at different places, he performs his identity according to his location and relationship with the people there; he displays an unfixed identity, defined and constructed situationally, by the very situation he finds himself in.

In Friedman’s view, “[e]ach situation presumes a certain setting as site for the interplay of different axes of power and powerlessness” (23). It is certainly not surprising then that Shahid tends to flee from his positions when he feels he is in a powerless situation. When Riaz takes him to the council flat to fight against racists, he yearns for Deedee so much that he finds an excuse to leave; when Deedee confronts him with the absurdity of worshipping an aubergine as the manifestation of Islamic faith, Shahid, deeply offended, goes back to the gang, having told her “It’s our culture, right?” (*BA* 209) When he is among his brothers, he sometimes feels “sick of being bossed around, whether by Riaz or Chad or God himself” (*BA* 272) and he finds “the world to be more subtle and inexplicable” (*BA* 133) than the way the gang sees it. In Deedee’s arms, lost in “the warm memory of the love they’d made and the pleasures she’d introduced him to” (*BA* 130), he feels guilty for having succumbed to the temptations of the flesh. When he visits Deedee, he is tortured by the thought of “betraying [the gang] by leaving” (*BA* 144) and realizes that he “didn’t want his life to change so much; he didn’t want to be pushed into her arms” (*BA* 258); back with the gang, he resents that they

“wanted to own him entirely” (BA 128) – hence he leaves again and again, his movement marked by momentary arrivals and departures.

Shahid’s physical movement in the city thus becomes the manifestation of his mental movement, of how “his life shifted daily” (BA 148), displaying a perpetual swinging between the communality and orthodox rules of fundamentalism, and the individuality and mobility of liberalism; fixity and flux; situatedness and placelessness.⁸⁶

It seemed like days since he’d been alone ... he had been resisting his own company, running from himself. It wasn’t mere boredom he feared; the questions he dreaded were those that interrogated him about what he had got into with Riaz on one side, and Deedee on the other. He believed everything; he believed nothing. His own self increasingly confounded him. One day he could passionately feel one thing, the next day the opposite. Other times provisional states would alternate from hour to hour; sometimes all crashed into chaos. He would wake up with this feeling: who would he turn out to be on this day? How many warring selves were there within him? Which was his real, natural self? Was there such a thing? How would he know it when he saw it? Would it have a guarantee attached to it? Lost in such a room of broken mirrors, with jagged reflections backing into eternity, he felt numb. His instinct was to escape” (BA 147).

Although Shahid comes to realise the possibility of several selves, he feels they are contradictory, ‘warring’ with one other, and he is still relatively fixed on the existence of a “natural,” that is, ‘true self. Yet again, he goes through an identity crisis, this time not triggered by the social processes and his self-image in one specific location, but by the contradiction and discrepancy between two ideologies, positions and locales, as well as the frightful realisation of the duality (or multiplicity) of his identity – he is trapped in two distinct loops of incomplete metamorphosis. To resolve his confusion, he changes his subject positions constantly and rapidly, as if there were a secret door connecting his two worlds, through which he could slip easily from Deedee to the gang and vice versa. This phenomenon may be explained by Friedman’s claim that the fluidity of “situational identity” suggests “a concept of permeable boundaries” (48). There is indeed a thin line and an easy shifting

⁸⁶ Here I use the term placelessness in the spatial sense of not having one fixed place or location. As opposed to the rigid sense of place fundamentalism entails, liberalism enables a multitude of places and mobility among them and emphasises “freedom as motion” (Feldman, 2001), as physical and social mobility (Cf. Squire, 2011; Freudendal-Pedersen, 2012).

between Shahid's contradictory subject positions and ways of identification, because they are equally important in the construction of his situational identity – as Maria Degabriele points out, “Shahid sees bits of himself reflected in his lover, Deedee, and his love of music, literature, drugs and sex. And he sees bits of himself reflected in the Islamic brothers who recognise and resist Western cultural imperialism” (para 7). Antagonistic as they are, these two spheres of Shahid's life nonetheless prove to be interdependent – spirituality and sexuality, religion and art, belonging in possession and belonging in movement are the multiple factors and traits that make up ‘the whole self’ which Shahid longs for. Shahid's sense of belonging is thus an attachment to fluidity, that is, in Probyn's words a belonging which “captures more accurately the desire for some sort of attachment, be it to other people, places or modes of being, and the ways in which individuals and groups are caught within wanting to belong, wanting to become, a process that is fuelled by yearning rather than the positing of identity as a stable state” (19). It is a metamorphosis into a multiple positionality and identity that Shahid has yet to come to terms with.

In the end, one incident, the infamous book-burning of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*,⁸⁷ forces Shahid to single out one identity position, to take sides and dedicate himself to one ideology that would rule his life: either religion or art. Although having had numerous debates and talks with the group about the role of literature, Shahid fails to assert his opinion and convince Riaz of the importance of free imagination and the individual voice (BA 183-4). Thus when the group sets out to destroy the ‘blasphemous’ writing, Shahid feels he has no other choice but to follow them; when Deedee wants to protect him from this mistake, he “couldn't have been more grateful,” yet “he pushed her hands away” (BA 221), only to find himself perplexed and lost in the crowd of angry people, “giving himself over to bitter nihilism, destruction and hatred,” unable “to tell the sane from the mad, wrong from right, good from bad,” experiencing everything “in motion, feeling “he was stumbling through space” (BA 220). As the crowd grows more violent and physical in their hatred, Shahid's warring selves manifest themselves in dichotomies of emotions and a ‘blitz’ of negative feelings, until he suddenly realises that he couldn't possibly join the mob, since he lacks their “ecstatic rigidity” (BA 225) and religious fervour. This awakening echoes and confirms his earlier realisation that “there was, now – he was convinced of it – no one watching over them”

⁸⁷ The Rushdie affair and the book-burning also appear in *White Teeth*, where Millat and his friends travel to Bradford to take part in the protest against a “dirty” book (233), which they have not even read yet fiercely disapprove of: “[H]e knew he had no face in this country, no voice in the country, until ... suddenly people like Millat were on every channel and every radio and every newspaper and they were angry, and Millat recognized the anger, thought it recognized him, and grabbed it with both hands” (234).

(BA 165). By way of differentiating between ‘them’ (the gang/ the book burners/ fixed identity) and ‘us’ (Deedee/ the advocates of literature and the freedom of the imagination/ fluid identity), Kureishi shows how Shahid moves from a position implying distance to one asserting proximity, and how he eventually acknowledges the fact that believing is not “a matter of truth or falsity, of what could be shown and what not, but of joining” (BA 133). Shahid’s final reaction to the book-burning represents Kureishi’s interest in religion not as spirituality but “as an ideology, as a system of authority, a kind of business” (qtd. in Thomas 102), as well as his belief in “art as a survival strategy for the Asian British character” (Ghose 131) as opposed to fundamentalism, which he perceives as a sign of “the failure of our most significant attribute, our imagination” (Kureishi, *The Word* 103).⁸⁸

In creating his very own ‘belief system,’ Shahid opts for belonging in pop culture “where fragmentation, change, undecidability are the norm” (Degabriele, para 29), i.e. he decides for the position which best captures the multiplicity of his identity or, in other words, his hybridity. With the assertion “I can’t be limited” (BA 272), he turns his back on the group and embarks on a journey with Deedee, both physically (going to the seaside and visiting his mother in Kent) and mentally: “He didn’t know what would become of any of them; but for himself, he’d be with her. He’d take what she offered; he’d give her what he could. He had never relied on anyone before” (BA 275). Shahid’s choice of Deedee, and thereby of liberalism and individualism, however, by no means indicates a choice to settle, to return to situatedness and fixity, but a decision to keep his options open and engage in their “new adventure” “until it stops being fun” (BA 276). This temporary engagement and Shahid’s plan to explore the world signal his intention and ability to sense place and belong in multiple ways, particularly through movement. His search for belonging, that is, his desire for situatedness and fixity, which is manifested in his subject positions and identity performances, paradoxically generates movement and metamorphosis. At one point in the novel, as a response to Riaz’s proclaimed alienness in England, Shahid claims: “There’s nowhere else I will feel more comfortable” (BA 175). His claim echoes Kureishi’s belief that the second generation belongs in Britain, not where their parents’ cultural roots are: “[F]or me and the others of my generation born here, Britain was always where we belonged, even when we were told – often in terms of racial abuse – that this was not so” (*My Beautiful Laundrette* 135). Shahid’s situatedness in the countryside and rootedness in England transforms into a

⁸⁸ For further accounts of Kureishi’s view on Islam, fundamentalism and the role of literature see Ghose 121-138; Gunnig 68-81; Ranasinha, *Hanif Kureishi* 92-101; and Upstone, *British Asian Fiction* 37-61.

positionality experienced in the capital and eventually gives way to a multiple identity in physical and mental mobility and fluidity, belonging in perpetual movement.

While both *Maps* and *Anita* primarily focus on the collective memory of and the myths created about the homeland, as well as on the diasporic subject's homing desire for a fixed place to belong to, in *The Black Album* Kureishi's portrayal of Shahid's search for alternative ways of belonging signals the diasporians' changing attitude to and relationship with space and place. In Aslam's and Syal's novels the need for a sense of belonging is an essential element in the creation of diaspora spaces, produced by the specific cultural, religious and social practices of a diasporic community, that is, by its collective expressions of identity and belonging. The portrayal of space in these two novels suggests that these practices also foster the creation of bi- or multicultural space. In return, urban, suburban and rural spaces trigger the creation of diaspora spaces as third spaces and the identity construction of diasporians as hybrid subjectivities, and may generate various forms of mapping, movement, transgression, and metamorphosis, which is well exemplified in the figures of Shamas and Meena, as well as by Shahid's belonging in movement.

In their own ways, the three novels provide a portrayal of the formation of diasporic subjectivities, the metamorphosis from a desire for fixed cultural identities to an acknowledgment of fluid identities and multiple identity positions. Likewise, they represent diaspora spaces as constantly in formation and without fixed boundaries, as spaces that may appear on several levels and assume various shapes and sizes within bi- and multicultural spaces, and may also intersect with them. Revealing the construction and the complex position of diaspora, *Maps for Lost Lovers*, *Anita and Me* and *The Black Album* rewrite the topography of English cultural landscapes and social spaces, and by doing so they directly challenge the monolithic notions of ethnic, regional and national identity; they both represent and are representatives of metamorphosis.

Chapter 2

“Any Kind of Movement”

Tourism, *Flânerie* and Nomadism in Urban and Suburban Space

After decolonisation, the first wave of diaspora writers used mostly London as the backdrop for their portrayal of immigrant experience; it was the ultimate location to write from and to write about: works such as V. S. Naipaul’s *The Mimic Men* (1967) portrayed a rugged immigrant experience as the diasporic subject fought their way in urban space, and they mythologized the metropolis as the capital of colonial-imperial Britain. The next generations of diaspora writers (e.g. Salman Rushdie, Hanif Kureishi, and Atima Srivastava), however, provide different readings from different positions: through the eyes of British-educated, or British-born second-generation authors, London is depicted as a multicultural postcolonial space.⁸⁹ Their specific individual perspectives reveal new traits of the city’s multifaceted and fluid character, and also draw attention to the liminal and hybrid London suburbs. As David James notes, their accounts of postcolonial London aim at writing “an adequate response to a city that both fosters ethnic diversity while perpetuating conditions of displacement” (74).

According to John McLeod, contemporary diaspora literature offers “alternative and revisionary narratives of subaltern city spaces” (4) and thus both records and triggers the birth of a ‘postcolonial London,’ which “does not factually denote a given place or mark a stable location on a map. It emerges at the intersection of the concrete and the noumenal, between the material conditions of metropolitan life and the imaginative representations made of it. It is as much a product of ‘facticity’ as a creation of the novels, poems and other texts” (McLeod 7). McLeod here draws on Julian Wolfreys’s observation that “London ‘is not a place as such’ but also ‘takes place’ in its literary representations” (Wolfreys, *Writing London* 4). As John Clement Ball asserts, in many of these representations London is appropriated as “a social space marked by specific racial and cultural experiences, and as a site that [is] both enabling and limiting” (“Semi-detached” 12).⁹⁰

⁸⁹ See McLeod’s introduction to *Postcolonial London* (2004), “Locating Postcolonial London,” for an insightful analysis of this change.

⁹⁰ Examples include Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* (1988), Atima Srivastava’s *Transmission* (1992) and *Looking for Maya* (1999) Ardashir Vakil’s *One Day* (2003), Roopa Farooki’s *Corner Shop* (2009), as well as

Such a dichotomy is also characteristic of the suburb – a “somewhat unlikely, uneventful black British venue,” yet, at the same time, “one of the most significant settings of black and Asian cultural production in recent years,” having a “diasporic potential as a landscape *in-between*” (Procter, *Dwelling Places* 125-6). As a liminal space or a version of Bhabhaian third space, suburbia is “a little world of its own ... it maps an imaginary territory, which in turn gives place to the projection of other ‘little worlds,’ worlds of whimsy, anxiety, comedy and fear” (Wolfreys, *Literature* 98). These “little worlds” include a number of immigrant neighbourhoods and ghettos, each with its own identifiable (multi)ethnic character, such as Hounslow, depicted in Gautam Malkani’s *Londonstani* (2008); Tooting, the setting of Roopa Farooki’s *Bitter Sweets* (2007); and Southall, with the largest concentration of South Asians (mainly Sikhs) in Britain, the district the protagonist of Nirpal Singh Dhaliwal’s *Tourism* (2006) hails from.⁹¹ Their vivid accounts of the suburbs of Greater London contradict Dominic Head’s claim that “suburbia is the most difficult social space to describe” (213); in fact they add new colours and shades to the so-called “suburban imaginary,” as their protagonists are coming to terms with the fact that suburbia is “a state of mind ... constructed in imagination and in desire” (Silverstone 13).

It is not only the cultural diversity of its inhabitants, but also the interconnectedness and discrepancies between the city and the suburb that posit Greater London as a hybrid space, and thus an expedient location for the portrayal of the diasporic subject’s in-betweenness and hybridity. In this chapter I read Hanif Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) and Dhaliwal’s *Tourism* (2006), along with Kureishi’s *The Black Album* (1995) for additional insights into the urban and suburban spaces they depict from the aspects of identity, spatiality and movement. In these novels the metropolis, with its fluid and permeable borders, and the multitude of routes to take within and across these borders both literally and metaphorically, invites various forms of movement and various strategies of identity (re)construction, the creation of what I call mobile subjectivities: the figures of the nomad, the tourist and the *flâneur*. Dhaliwal’s and Kureishi’s novels also testify that urban and suburban space both enable and trigger mimicry and identity performance, which are vital parts of the British Asians diaspora experience, and thus integral to the analysis of movement and subjectivity in British Asian diaspora fiction.

Sunetra Gupta’s *The Glassblower’s Breath* (1999), Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane* (2004), and Kureishi’s screenplays and novels e.g. *The Black Album* (1995) that I read both here and in chapter 1.

⁹¹ Although Chigwell in Essex, the setting of Meera Syal’s *Life Isn’t All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (2000) technically does not form a part of Greater London, as a largely suburban town home to a South-Asian community, it fits in well among the above mentioned novels set in the suburbs.

The Buddha of Suburbia

In “*My Beautiful Laundrette and The Rainbow Sign*” (1986) Kureishi proposes a new definition of Britishness that could/should do away with the fossilised and monolithic notion of national identity and the conscious ignorance of Britain’s changed position as a result of decolonisation:

It is the British, the white British, who have to learn that being British isn’t what it was. Now it is a more complex thing involving new elements. So there must be a fresh way of seeing Britain and the choices it faces: and a new way of being British after all this time. Much thought, discussion and self-examination must go into seeing the necessity for this, what this ‘new way of being British’ involves and how difficult it might be to attain. The failure to grasp this opportunity for a revitalized and broader self-definition in the face of a real failure to be human, will be more insularity, schism, bitterness and catastrophe. (18).

The new kind of Britishness Kureishi calls and speaks up for is manifested in his protagonist Karim Amir, his ‘prototype’ for the British hybrid, whose journey, routes and identity formation might well be seen as a metaphor of Britain’s struggles to come to terms with its unstable position and changing national identity after decolonisation. In the fairly traditional narrative form of a *Bildungsroman*, Kureishi portrays Karim’s search for his place in the world, for the identity he feels most comfortable with. Karim is brought up in the white lower middle-class suburb of Bromley and longs for the mobility of the city; he is running away from the rootedness, boredom and stasis of the suburbs, yet, paradoxically, it is the restlessness of the suburbs that makes him fidgety. His desire for pleasure and mobility is manifested in perpetual motion, which, I argue, is a nomadic movement in Greater London, between the urban and suburban spaces, which generate his in-betweenness and identity performance, embody his hybridity, and help the construction of a mobile subjectivity.

In-betweenness and the hybrid(ity) of suburbia

The novel starts off with Karim’s trenchant self-identification as a cultural hybrid: “My name is Karim Amir, and I am an Englishman, born and bred, almost. I am often considered to be a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories. But I don’t care – Englishman I am (though not proud of it), from the South London suburbs

and going somewhere” (*BS* 3). Karim’s words suggest several aspects of hybridity: first, he is a hybrid in a biological sense, as a man of mixed-race (Anglo-Indian) origin; then, as a second-generation immigrant born and brought up in Britain he is hybridized by the dominant culture; and thirdly, he is also a hybrid in the sense of being a representative of Kureishi’s vision of a new kind of Britishness: a challenge to racist representations of the hybrid, the possibility of a new transcultural national identity. Nonetheless, it must be noted that Karim appears to lack the adequate cultural credentials to qualify not only as bi-racial but also as bi-cultural: he has never visited the homeland of his parents, he does not speak Urdu or Punjabi, he is not religious, and he receives no traditional education or cultural orientation from his father (himself an assimilated, “Englishified”⁹² Indian). Karim’s self-identification as ‘Englishman’ and his determined hedonism thus imply that he is “embedded in Western individualism and its patterns of consumption, and [is] resistant to any genuine cross-fertilisation of cultural traditions” (Hammond 226).⁹³

By claiming to be “going somewhere,” Karim both foreshadows the undetermined routes he shall take, and displays certain uneasiness and a sense of in-betweenness generated both by his mixed-race origins and the suburbs:

Perhaps it is the odd mixture of continents and blood, of here and there, of belonging and not, that makes me restless and easily bored. Or perhaps it was being brought up in the suburbs that did it. Anyway, why search the inner room when it’s enough to say that I was looking for trouble, any kind of movement, action, and sexual interest I could find. (*BS* 3)⁹⁴

Without the presence of Indian cultural practices and family expectations, there is no trace of a discrepancy between his father’s culture and the dominant culture in Karim’s life (as is the case with many second-generation immigrants, and as I have claimed in the case of Meena and the youths in *Maps*), nor are there restrictions on his growing up in a Westernised way, in

⁹² I borrowed this term from Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* (286).

⁹³ Andrew Hammond also notes that, later in the novel, Karim realises how he has been “‘denying’ his Indian self”; he feels “‘ashamed and incomplete ..., as if half of me were missing,’ but even then he talks superficially about the ‘personality bonus of an Indian past’ (*BS* 212-3)” (Hammond 226-7).

⁹⁴ Although Kureishi denied that *The Buddha* was autobiographical, Karim’s figure echoes the author’s origins and motivation. Similarly to his protagonist, Kureishi is ‘mixed-race’ (his father is Pakistani and his mother is English) and was brought up in the south-east London suburb of Bromley, where he experienced loneliness and discrimination – two major factors that contributed to his desire to cross the threshold (i.e. the River Thames), and immerse himself in the excitements and adventures of Central London: “for us the important place, really, was the river. And when you got on the train and you crossed the river, at that moment there was an incredible sense that you were entering another kind of world ... And so, for me, London became a kind of inferno of pleasures and madness” (qtd. in MacCabe 37).

awe of the pursuit of pleasure and individuality. Consequently, the key to Karim's hybrid Britishness may in fact lie in his suburban identity. He may not represent suburban culture, nor does he internalise suburban values – in fact he even distances himself from them – but, for all that, he is the child of suburbia, the embodiment and metonymy of suburban identity. Drawing on Todd Kuchta's assertion that suburbia is "the epitome and the antithesis of the nation's home – on the one hand quintessentially English, on the other hand bristling anxiously over its perceived inferiority" (5), as well as on Kureishi's claim that "England is primarily a suburban country and English values are suburban values" ("Some time" 100), I suggest that in Karim's case it is his identity as a suburbanite that offers the fourth and perhaps most significant aspect of his hybridity. In James Procter's words, Karim's "unstable, hybrid identity is not simply the product of ethnicity (of being Indian and English), but of *locality*" (*Dwelling Places* 153) [original emphasis], that is, it is generated and nurtured by the suburb, itself a hybrid, liminal space.

The hybridity of the suburb has been theorised widely both in urban studies and, as a result of the increasing use of the suburb as a setting in contemporary novels, in literary criticism.⁹⁵ In his literary study of London, John Clement Ball, for example, asserts that the suburb is "a hybrid space between nature and community, country and city" (*Imagining* 231) and that its in-betweenness is both spatial and temporal, i.e. the suburb "can represent the 'undefined present' caught between 'an image of the past' that Raymond Williams identifies with the country and 'an image of the future' he associates with the city (297)" (*Imagining* 231).⁹⁶ In *Visions of Suburbia* urban theorist Roger Silverstone goes one step further and claims that the "modern suburb is a social as well as cultural hybrid. Suburban culture is a social as well as a cultural hybrid" (7); it "is revealed, as well as masked, in all its overblown hybridity" (4). What is more, for Silverstone the suburb is not only liminal but also marginal, as it is "always on the edge, always defined by what the city and the country are not" (5); thus suburbia "as a site of multiracial British culture" (Kuchta 202) may also be perceived as the manifestation of the liminality of diasporic identity and of the marginality of the British Asian diaspora.

According to Wolfreys, the hybridity of the suburb is manifested in "a certain ambiguity of identity, the result of its hybrid borrowing from more than one source or

⁹⁵ For useful studies see Clapson (1988) and Kuchta (2010).

⁹⁶ Here Clement Ball quotes Williams's 1973 study, *The Country and the City*.

location” (*Literature* 97), while in Silverstone’s view it is a result of a gradual process of hybridization, which he describes as follows:

[B]uried not far beneath the surface of [the suburbs’] apparent uniformity lie distinctions that depend less on origin than on activity ..., embodied perhaps in the ghostly images of family albums: the product of *the hybridization of time*. Expressed in the floodlit privacy of suburban yards and car ports ... are identities that both reconcile and deny the essential differences between urban and rural life ...: *the hybridization of space* ... But the differences grounded in the differences of position in the system of production have gradually been overlaid and replaced by the differences of position grounded in the system of consumption (Bourdieu 1984), and though they arguably remain, they are muted and transformed: the result, *a hybridization of culture*. (8-9)

In Silverstone’s analysis, the hybridity of the suburb is described by means of a set of dichotomies: “Instantly recognizable though never entirely familiar. Ubiquitous but invisible. Secure but fragile. Desired but reviled. Suburbia is neither singular nor unchanging ... in each case the suburb is the embodiment of ... the attempt to marry town and country, and to create for middle classes middle cultures in middle spaces” (4). Suburbia is, then, forever intertwined with the concepts of in-betweenness, liminality and hybridity, and, I argue, it is the quintessential metonymy of these notions.

Similarly to Silverstone, Kureishi’s protagonist perceives suburbanites as middle-brow, and he also identifies the suburbs with provinciality, boredom and stasis: “In the suburbs people rarely dreamed of striking out for happiness. It was all familiarity and endurance: security and safety were the reward of dullness” (*BS* 8). Karim’s suburban world, the ‘sticks’ (*BS* 138), encompasses Beckenham, where his father appears as “the Buddha of Suburbia,” providing spiritual guidance for the oriental-loving middle-class suburbanites gathering in his love interest Eva’s home. Besides, there is the countrified Chislehurst of Karim’s Aunt Jane and Uncle Ted, which is composed of “greenhouses, grand oaks and sprinklers” (*BS* 29) and where the roads are “deliberately left corrugated with stones and pits, to discourage ordinary people from driving up and down” (*BS* 29). Karim also frequently visits his father’s old friend Anwar and his family in racialized Penge, “closer to London than our suburbs, and far poorer. It was full of neo-fascist groups, thugs who had their own pubs

and clubs and shops ... At night they roamed the streets, beating Asians and shoving shit and burning rags through their letter-boxes” (BS 56).

In contrast with Penge, Karim’s native Bromley, his ‘natural habitat,’ is an English cultural space with few Asians, where “the streets were solid with white faces’ (BS 65). Kureishi portrays Bromley as a consumer culture, characterised by ‘the painstaking accumulation of comfort and, with it, status – the concrete display of earned cash’ (BS 75); and thence as an exhibition, where the facade is of crucial importance so both people and houses are “done-up” (BS 74), and where the “ordinary suburban family” has a “show-off quotient,” i.e. it is “pretentious and snobbish” (BS 150), and is obsessed with refurbishing and “neighbourly tourism” (Procter, *Dwelling Places* 148). Kureishi’s/Karim’s observations echo Silverstone’s claims that the south-east London suburbs have “a precise ethnicity, class and gender: white, middle-class, male” (23), and that “Bromley is both unique and entirely typical. In this it is exemplary” (4).⁹⁷

With all its virtues and vices, suburbia is “a manner of living, an attitude to life, an atmosphere” (Sawyer 9), and the suburban setting is both a “limit” and “the motor for movement” (Brook 211). Suburbia, Bromley, and the parental home make Karim claustrophobic and desperately yearning to escape its confines: “I couldn’t wait to get out of the house now. I always wanted to be somewhere else, I don’t know why” (BS 4-5). In Procter’s view, the Amir family’s semi-detached house becomes “a metonym of suburbia’s smallness and parochialism, its confinement from the worldly internationalism of the city that Karim is so keen to inhabit” (*Dwelling Places* 149) – hence the antagonism of city and suburb as “Public. Private. Paradise. Prison” (Silverstone 5). While the small semi-detached house stands for suburbia, Karim imagines London as “a house with five thousand rooms, all different; the kick was to work out how they connected and eventually to walk through all of them” (BS 126). In the silence of the suburb, the place he hates to belong to, Karim fantasises about London *belonging to him*:

⁹⁷ According to Silverstone, Bromley’s unique ordinariness lies in the fact that it was inhabited by the newly risen bourgeoisie living in “grand villas”, but “it quickly succumbed to more speculative, underplanned and less ostentatious development” (3). In addition, it was “one of the crucibles for punk rock in the UK” (4) and a frequently used setting for the urban novelists such as Andrea Levy, Ian McEwan and Julian Barnes, and novelists born and brought up in Bromley such as H. G. Wells and, of course, Kureishi, whose name will probably always trigger an association with the suburb of Bromley: “[T]he most significant suburb in British pop history is probably Bromley, setting for Kureishi’s novel ... the quintessential suburban star, David Bowie, the quintessential suburban fans, the Bromley contingent” (Frith qtd. in Silverstone, 271).

There was a sound that London had. It was, I'm afraid, people in Hyde Park playing bongos with their hands; there was also the keyboard on the Doors's "Light My Fire". There were kids dressed in velvet cloaks who lived free lives; there were thousands of black people everywhere, so I wouldn't feel exposed; there were bookshops with racks of magazines printed without capital letters or bourgeois disturbance of full stops; there were shops selling all the records you could desire; there were parties where girls and boys you didn't know took you upstairs and fucked you; there were all the drugs you could use. You see, I didn't ask much of life; this was the extent of my longing. But at least my goals were clear and I knew what I wanted. I was twenty. I was ready for anything. (*BS* 121)

For Karim, the city is the location of endless possibilities; he has a mental image of what Jean Baudrillard calls a simulacrum, "a real without origin or reality" (1),⁹⁸ when he pictures the city as a "space of discovery, experience, indulgence, and consumption" (Clement Ball, *Imagining* 231), of "alleged freedom, multiracial tolerance, cultural novelty, sexual licence and narcotic adventurousness" (McLeod 139) – the antonym of everything that suburbia represents. Karim's desire to escape the suburbs are also fuelled by his experiences of racial discrimination and abuse – in the relatively peaceful suburb of Bromley, where, as a symptom of suburban living "there is a refusal to admit humanity beyond the family" (Kureishi, "Some time" 101), Karim's alleged blackness provides his white schoolmates with a reason for racist attacks, which he recalls the following way: "I was sick ... of being affectionately called Shitface and Curryface, and of coming home covered in spit and snot and chalk and woodshavings. ... Every day I considered myself lucky to get home from school without serious injury. (*BS* 62-3)

Mimicry and performance

As Karim's words above imply, the suburbs are "closed communities where the discrepant is clearly identified and expelled" (Sibley, *Geographies* 38); thus, the racial other's only chance for 'survival' is assimilation and subjection, or the pretence of these in the form of mimicry. What follows is that the suburb enables, probably even requires, the theatrical performance of different identities. To avoid trouble, Karim and his cousin Jamila frequently pretend to be

⁹⁸ See Baudrillard, especially chapter 1, "The Precession of Simulacra," for a detailed discussion of simulation and simulacra.

someone else thus attempting to disguise their identities: “Yeah, sometimes we were French, Jammie and I, and other times we went black American. The thing was, we were supposed to be English, but to the English we were always wogs and nigs and Pakis and the rest of it” (*BS* 53). In my view, Karim’s role-plays here on one hand indicate mimicry as resistance,⁹⁹ against his image as a minority subject¹⁰⁰ and a suburbanite. On the other hand, reading these (mainly linguistic) role-plays as attempts at avoiding racial abuse evoke the notion of mimicry for survival (like certain animals’ mimicry in their natural environment), or what Roger Caillois refers to as defensive mimicry, applied “either to hide oneself from an aggressor (concealing mimicry) or else to terrify the aggressor by means of one’s deceptive appearance (frightening mimicry)” (91) – that is, in Karim’s case, hiding behind an accent, and, thereby concealing his locality, or confusing/frightening away the abusers by the discrepancy between his looks and language.

As the excerpt from the novel indicates, Karim’s defensive mimicry is far from successful – he cannot escape the racism and prejudice of the white British, nor his “destiny, which is to be a half-caste in England” (*BS* 141). Nevertheless, ever so often, he manages to turn his hybridity into an advantage as he continues to engage in conscious, “direct” mimicry,¹⁰¹ a constant role-play, performing his identity as the situation suits him. For instance, he tries to fade into his environment by applying the ‘hip’ look and language of western youth or emphasises his exotic appearance by wearing a “scarlet Indian waistcoat with gold stitching around the edges” (*BS* 5), which, according to Procter, is nevertheless a hybrid look, because it “borrows as much from the mainstream London fashion and music scene ... and its fetishisation of the orient in the 1960s and 1970s, as it does from any genuine cross-cultural dialogue with India” (*Dwelling Places* 129).

⁹⁹ For various theories related to the concept of mimicry as resistance, see Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture* (1985), Jacques Derrida’s “The Double Session” in *Dissemination* (1983), Luce Irigaray’s *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1985), and Robert Young’s *White Mythologies* (1990), which provides a comprehensive account of these theories. I shall also elaborate on Bhabha’s notion of mimicry as resistance later on in the chapter.

¹⁰⁰ This aspect of Karim’s mimicry is also underlined later in the novel when, going out with Jamila’s husband Changez, Karim tries to avoid any identification with him in terms of race and ethnicity: “I forced Changez to wear a bobble-hat over his face in case the lads saw he was a Paki and imagined I was one too” (*BS* 98).

¹⁰¹ In Caillois’s theory, frightening mimicry comprises two categories: “*direct mimicry*,” where there is an immediate interest in disguising oneself; and “*indirect mimicry*,” in which the display of resemblance is due to an unconscious adaptation or process of becoming similar to another person/animal. See Caillois’s “Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia” 91-2.

Karim's Indianness, similarly to his father's Orientalism, has little to do with connecting to the roots¹⁰² – it is a theatrical performance given for an expected benefit, while the identity it suggests is a staged identity, a “staged exoticism” (Procter, *Dwelling Places* 129). With all its narrow-mindedness, pretentiousness and emphasis on the facade, suburbia appears in the novel as a theatre for Victor Turner's social drama (Cf. Chapter 1), a stage for acting out various roles and performances, which Karim consciously plays upon yet, at the same time, despises and wants to escape from. Interestingly, it is exactly these performances that provide him with a hope to be able to break out of the dullness of the suburbs and his monolithic image as a hybrid, thus suburbia becomes the first stage of his identity formation and very site of “the performance and invention of alternative sexualities” (Brook 222).

Karim is attracted to both men and women and uses his good looks to engage in casual intercourse with members of both sexes, but his main object of desire is Eva's son Charlie, whose inevitable charm, aloofness and determination, as well as his ability to refashion himself according to the latest trends make him a role model and inspiration for Karim. In fact, Karim is not merely in love with Charlie – he worships him, mimics him and wishes to be him: “My love for him was unusual as love goes: it was not generous. I admired him more than anyone but I didn't wish him well. It was that I preferred him to me and wanted to be him. I coveted his talents, face, style. I wanted to wake up with them all transferred to me” (BS 15). Karim's desire to *become* Charlie points to René Girard's notion of mimicry, his mimetic theory elaborated in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* (1965), the basis of which is the so-called triangular desire among the subject, the object and the model/mediator.

In Girard's theory the modern subject is unable to live up to his self-expectations to be original, (i.e., to be wholly himself) and so he imitates the alleged originality of the other to mask his own lack and to “camouflage the essential role which the Other plays in his desires” (302). As a result, he pretends that, like the other, he also “chooses the objects of his own

¹⁰² Instead of striving to preserve his roots as many first-generation South Asian immigrants do, Haroon is portrayed as consciously choosing to assimilate, or, by means of mimicry, to appear as an assimilated British subject; as Karim recalls, Haroon “spent years trying to be more of an Englishman, to be less risibly conspicuous” (BS21). However, once he manages to become an acculturated Englishman, he feels a need for a spiritual background, so he takes up yoga, starts wearing a Nehru jacket and buys books on “Buddhism, Sufism, Confucianism and Zen” from “the oriental bookshop in Cecil Court, off Charing Cross” (BS5) to provide him with a sense of belonging and, at the same time, to elevate him from among ordinary, ‘petty’ citizens by the exotic image his newly-acquired spiritualism and “self-taught ‘Indianness’” (Procter, *Dwelling Places* 129) projects. Therefore, as Clement Ball notes, Haroon's second migration from the suburbs to the city “corresponds with his metamorphosis into a ‘Buddha’ with an exaggerated Indian accent and a salmagundi of Eastern mythical platitudes” (*Imagining* 233). Eventually Haroon's identity performance as a spiritual leader and exotic other fails to resolve his crisis of cultural identity, and leaves him with a desire not for his roots but for an imaginary homeland: “We old Indians come to like this England less and less and we return to an imagined India” (BS 74)

desire” (295) – and this is precisely how triangular desire comes to life. In her introduction to Girard’s “Triangular Desire,” Dorothy Hale summarizes the process the following way:

[T]he individual deceives himself that he desires an object that will satisfy him and that he can possess – when in truth he desires something that he can never be: the autonomous subject the mediator seems to be. The ‘object’ is thus itself a disguise, a mask to hide the subject’s dependence upon another person. But we should also remember that the mediator himself is in some ways simply an ‘object’ to begin with, the screen upon which the subject projects the initial fantasy of achieved individuality. He is projected first as the autonomous individual and then as the ‘rival’ who possesses or seeks to possess the object that the subject believes himself to desire” (286-8).

What follows is that, whether perceived as desire, love, or envy, the “impulse toward the object is ultimately an impulse toward the mediator” (Girard 299). When Karim imitates Charlie he displays what Girard calls the “mimetic nature of desire” (306); when he admits to himself that he is not only in love with him but with what he *possesses* – talent, charm, charisma and, as a result, an infinite number of possibilities to live a hedonistic lifestyle – he appears to be trapped in a triangular desire where he is the subject, Charlie is the model/mediator, and all the “trouble ... movement, action and sexual interest” (*BS* 3) Karim has been longing for and Charlie seems to have already had is the object. On the other hand, the fact that Charlie is desired and envied by many makes him the object of desire as well, which suggests that Karim is engaged in a rivalry with several mediators, whose originality or wholeness he desires – young people who are neither hybrids, nor in-betweeners unlike himself.

As feelings of rivalry and desire intertwine, Karim begins to realize the imperfection and unoriginality of his mediator-object: “[Charlie] earned his appreciation with his charm, which was often mistaken for ability ... I began to perceive [his] charm as a method of robbing ... there were objects of yours he wanted. And he took them. It was false and manipulative and I admired it tremendously” (*BS* 118-9). Hence, Karim as the subject is “torn between two opposite feelings toward his model [/mediator] – the most submissive reverence and the most intense malice. This is the passion we call hatred” (Girard 299-300). Karim’s hatred reaches its climax when his opportunity to move on from the suburbs finally arrives, while Charlie’s musical career seems to halt, that is, when the power relations between

subject and mediator seemingly reverses. Having recognized Charlie's weakness, Karim finally confronts him: "You're not going anywhere – not as a band and not as a person ... To go somewhere you gotta be talented, Charlie ... You're a looker, and everything, a face ... But you're work don't amaze me, and I need to be amazed" (*BS* 121). This triangular desire and rivalry is only resolved, or rather paused, when Charlie becomes a successful punk singer and disappears from Karim's life, thus becoming what Girard calls an "external mediator;" the distance between the two of them is "sufficient to eliminate any contact between the two spheres of possibilities of which the mediator and the subject occupy the respective centers" (299). Nevertheless, it is only towards the end of the novel that Karim manages to give up both his desire for, and hatred of, Charlie, finally losing all interest in him: "I'd moved beyond him, discovering myself through what I rejected" (*BS* 255), he claims. Until then, however, Karim, like Charlie, lives his life as a "chameleon" (Procter, *Dwelling Places* 153), always assuming a false identity but never discovering or revealing the core behind it.

The city as a theatre

When Haroon leaves his family for Eva and they decide to move to the city, Karim's dreams to leave the microcosm of the suburbs for Central London, the hub of the universe, are finally within his reach. Since he has always considered the suburb as merely temporary accommodation, "a leaving place, the start of life" (*BS* 117), Bromley becomes a point of departure in contrast to the city, the place of 'arrival;' that is, the place where he can finally 'be himself.' Karim's move to the city is, from this aspect, an instance of "local migration" (Nasta, *Home Truths* 181)¹⁰³ or what Clement Ball calls "a small-scale migration" (*Imagining* 233), "a one-way journey, a permanent location in a new and stimulating urban space" ("Semi-detached" 21). Since Karim has previously only been a tourist in London,¹⁰⁴ his vision of the city as a stimulating place, "bottomless in its temptations" (*BS* 8), is merely a simulacrum, while his view is "a visitor's view of London, part fantastical, part compensatory for the stasis and gloom of the suburbs" (McLeod 138-9).

¹⁰³ In her analysis of the British Asian novels of the 1980s, Nasta claims that the local migrations they portray "seek to explore new 'routes' for maintaining and domesticating the 'other within'" (*Home Truths* 181) and are linked to the "lived realities" of diasporic existence, which involve "discrete navigations across the frontiers of race and class in Britain" (*Home Truths* 181).

¹⁰⁴ One example of Karim's tourism is when he takes a train ride to the city to see a football match with Uncle Ted (*BS* 43). In my view, his excitement to see Brixton's hybrid black British community as a part of 'real London,' and his gaze through the window imply his position as a tourist in London and echo Puppy's experiences in the countryside in *Tourism*, as well as Chanu's tourism in *Brick Lane* and Shahid's in *The Black Album*.

Karim's tourism recalls Shahid's initial steps in the capital in Kureishi's *The Black Album*: mapping the streets of London and visiting the main tourist attractions, Shahid does not behave as a 'native Briton,' but as an outsider or foreigner: "So far ... all he'd done was ... wander around ... He went to Piccadilly and sat for an hour on the steps of Eros, hoping to meet a woman; wandered around Leicester Square and Covent Garden; entered an erotic bar ... He had never felt more invisible; somehow this wasn't the 'real' London" (BA 5). Although Shahid is "invisible" in London, that is, he does not turn any heads in a multiethnic city but seemingly fits in like a Londoner, his wanderings in the capital display typical tourist behaviour, not only in terms of his movement and routes but also of his perception of London. Similarly to tourists who visit places with a pre-formed picture in mind and a set of expectations generated by guide books, Shahid has a preliminary vision of what 'the real' London is like: "Before Shahid came to the city, sat in the Kent countryside dreaming of how rough and mixed London would be, his brother Chili had loaned him *Mean Streets* and *Taxi Driver* as preparation. But they were eventful films which hadn't steadied him for such mundane poverty" (BA 3). The quotation offers two possible interpretations of the unreal quality of the city: on one hand, it suggests that London is wearing a mask to charm tourists and, on the other hand, that Shahid's mental images and preconceptions about the capital were based on generalisations, of tourist images projected onto the city and thereby constructing its identity. The latter explanation may have been partly confirmed by the ethnic and cultural diversity of the dormitory he stays in (BA 1), but has, on the whole, dissolved during his wanderings as a tourist, only to give way to a second generalisation generated by his experiences in his very neighbourhood; as he says, "This was a road he was becoming familiar with; so far most of his notions about London were based on it" (BA 2-3).

As Shahid walks around the city and maps his immediate surroundings, London gradually reveals itself as a hybrid location; this hybridity, however, is not only that of the city, but also the embodiment of Shahid's hybridity. One example of this is suggested by Shahid's ambivalent relationship to the city. At times he feels "hurled in London," which he compares to an asylum: "[I]t's gigantic and everything's anonymous! Lunatics are everywhere but most of them look normal!" (BA 17) Although initially Shahid senses that the metropolis "mocked him" (BA 16) and did not live up to his expectations, later on, as he walks around aimlessly with Deedee, it seems "as if London existed only to provide them with satisfaction" (BA 122). Karim's dreams of the capital are similarly based on general preconceptions, and his expectations of pleasure and decadence, but are soon partially

replaced by urban reality; he is forced to realise that when watched from close up London can be just as intimidating as stimulating, no less liminal and hybrid than suburban Bromley: “West Kensington was an area in-between, where people stayed before moving up, or remained only because they were stuck” (*BS* 127), he contends. His revelation suggests that the inner city may be just as liminal and confining as the suburbs when inhabited by a ‘suburban race’ (i.e., the English – Cf. Kureishi, “Some time” 100). In unexpectedly suburban metropolitan space Karim at first feels “directionless and lost in the crowd” (*BS* 126), but then decides to take a chance on London, the ‘enabling location,’ and advance by doing what he knows best: mimicry and identity performance, selling his presumed Indianness and using his sexuality to obtain success and acceptance.

According to Rebecca Fine Romanow, Karim starts off his journey as Bhabha’s “mimic man” (*Location* 69), the “‘mime that haunts the mimesis,’ whose subversive simultaneous performance of self and Other ‘[terrorizes] authority with the ruse of recognition’ (Bhabha, *Location* 115)” (Romanow n.pag.). Romanow also notes that Karim plays upon “the ways in which he is perceived as native informant, performing the mimic man;” he both “enacts ‘Britishness’ and also utilizes his hybridity as a means of both mocking and subverting the white culture around him” (n.pag.). In line with Romanow’s analysis I suggest that London becomes Karim’s “playground” (*BS* 196), yet another stage for mimicry, role-play and identity performance, which is underlined and illustrated by his comparison of the metropolis to a dilapidated theatre: “As your buttocks were being punished on steel and plastic chairs, you’d look across gray floorboards at minimal scenery, maybe four chairs and a kitchen table set among a plain of broken bottles and bomb-sites, a boiling world with dry ice floating over the choking audience. London, in other words” (*BS* 207).

In *The Buddha*, London is portrayed as “a *theatrical* space, a locus of performance, display and spectatorship” (Procter, *Dwelling Places* 135) [original emphasis],¹⁰⁵ where Karim is, interestingly, finally valued – employed, paid and praised – for his exotic otherness and alleged authenticity. With Eva’s help, he gets the role of Mowgli in Shadwell’s production of *The Jungle Book*, thus his Indianness becomes a twofold staged identity: first, because he performs his identity as an Indian to get the role, and second, because he gets to repeat or enact this performance in the role of Mowgli. However, although Karim is cast for

¹⁰⁵ Joining Procter’s claim, Clement Ball asserts that Kureishi’s “London is a theatrical space” (*Imagining* 235), and thus reflects a tendency among South Asian writers who “regularly analogize the experience of London to that of the theatre,” continuing a long tradition of British authors for whom “the theatricality of London is its single, most important characteristic” (*Imagining* 152).

his authenticity in terms of origin, he is not authentic enough in terms of appearance and language, and because of his suburban roots, which Shadwell remarks on as follows: “What a breed of people two hundred years of imperialism has given birth to ... Everyone looks at you, I’m sure and thinks: an Indian boy, how exotic, how interesting, what stories of aunties and elephants we’ll hear now from him. And you’re from Orpington ... Oh God, what a strange world. The immigrant is the Everyman of the twentieth century” (*BS* 141). By referring to it as the “Everyman,” Kureishi posits the figure of the immigrant as, in Nasta’s words, “the physical sign and symbolic trope of late twentieth-century modernity, a professional mutator” (*Home Truths* 179), with all his hybridity and ability to hybridize the cultural space around him.

Karim’s hybridity, his ‘Creamy-ness,’¹⁰⁶ is undeniably visible, and since it endangers the success of his performance the director asks him to wear brown make-up all over his body, and to speak with an ‘authentic’ accent, the broken English of the South Asian immigrant. The proposed alterations make Karim “feel wrong” (*BS* 146); he feels uncomfortable as a Bengali, because it would mean both the denial of his hybridity and the assertion of hybridity as a ‘dead-end street,’ which Shadwell confronts Karim with the following way: “That must be complicated for you to accept – belonging nowhere, wanted nowhere” (*BS* 141). Shadwell’s words here suggest that hybridity as a third space involves non-belonging and echo the negative connotations of hybridity as an impurity that provokes racism.

As in the case of racist abuse in the suburbs, Karim at first resorts to defensive mimicry to survive (to keep the role) and then, standing up against Shadwell’s authority, to mimicry as resistance, “by suddenly relapsing into cockney at odd times. ‘Leave it out, Bagheera,’ I’d say” (*BS* 158). His mimicry of the allegedly prototypical Indian thus becomes an exaggerated copying of cultural markers, yet also a repetition with difference – a certain form of mockery, “one response to the circulation of stereotypes” (Huddart 39). By subverting the stereotypes that the theatrical performance entails, and by displaying identity as performance, Karim on one hand muddles his exoticised image: by “its slippage, its excess, its difference” (Bhabha, *Location* 86) it becomes “both reassuringly similar and also terrifying” (Huddart 41), thereby underlining Bhabha’s claim that “mimicry is at once

¹⁰⁶ “Creamy” (*BS* 54) is the nickname Jamila gives Karim to indicate and mock his bi-racial hybridity. In my view, Karim’s complexion as an ambiguous racial and cultural marker is also an effective tool for his various identity-performances, as well as for Kureishi’s attempt to disrupt the rigid image of the Englishman with Karim’s figure.

resemblance and menace” (*Location* 86), and also pointing back to Caillois’s notion of frightening mimicry. On the other hand, Karim as a ‘cockney Mowgli’ also asserts his metropolitan locality and comes to control the representation on his own terms. As a result, his hybridity, just like his mimicry, becomes a mode of resistance, a subversive response to Shadwell’s ‘dictatorship.’ As Homi Bhabha explains, “discrimination turns into the assertion of the hybrid, the insignia of authority becomes a mask, a mockery” (*Location* 120). Nevertheless, Karim’s decision to add some ‘local flavour’ to his character by speaking cockney is more for the sake of entertaining the audience and himself and contesting Shadwell’s directorship specifically, rather than the dominant discourse in general (that is, he is portrayed as being unaware of the subversive or transgressive quality of his performance which the text nevertheless implies here), and he repeatedly gives away his actual locality and roots, which lie not in Indian culture but in the London suburbs.

When in his next acting job the director Pyke asks Karim to invent his own character he clearly lacks an Indian role model and an idea of what a ‘real’ Indian is like. Karim decides to play Anwar, portraying him as a mean old man who goes on a hunger strike to force his daughter into a forced marriage and goes “raving in the street” (*BS* 181) against British morals and racist youths. When both Pyke and the black actress Stacey believe that Anwar’s portrayal presents black people in a negative light, Karim chooses Jamila’s crippled, ‘imported’ husband, Changez, as a model for a politically correct yet stereotypical enough representation of South Asians to conform to both black and white British expectations: “At night, at home I was working on ... the accent, which I knew would sound, to white ears ... characteristic of India” (*BS* 188-9). Karim’s goals and actions here can be said to have two interpretations: firstly, they may indicate a deliberate way of constructing the new British Asian identity that Kureishi advocates. Secondly, by creating a British Asian figure that the white British could accept, Karim once again relapses to mimicry in order to blend in, just like in his private life, trying to fit in among Londoners, in order to be able to immerse himself in the pleasures of London. In an attempt to conceal his suburban ordinariness and lack of artistic knowledge, Karim visits a number of fashionable places, clubs and parties with Eva, thus his mimicry, which involves clothing, language, cultural and sexual habits, is complemented by location as well. This *locational mimicry* – in Karim’s case the pretence to be metropolitan, even cosmopolitan, rather than suburban –, a sham facticity as it is, suggests an awareness of the close topological and tropological relationship between identity and

location: one's location can represent who one is or who one wants to be seen as; location is a powerful tool in both identity formation and identity performance.¹⁰⁷

It is interesting to compare Karim's and Shahid's changing attitude to, and perception of, the city at this point. While for Karim the city becomes a part of his mimicry, a mere facade, for Shahid urban space gradually transforms into a familiar place, where he no longer feels an outsider and a stranger: "He was becoming fond of the seedy variety of his manor, with its maniacs and miseries ... *His manor* – that's how he thought of it now. In London, if you found the right place, you could consider yourself a citizen the moment you went to the same local shop twice" (BA 193) [original emphasis]. Shahid gets to know London by sensory and sensual experience via Deedee and by movement in space, turning it to a place – his place, his "manor," i.e., to a personal territory, marked out by perpetual movement, most emphatically in his trajectories among his room in Kilburn, an immigrant neighbourhood in the East End and places of entertainment in the City. This strategy of growing into his environment recalls Yi-Fu Tuan's ideas about the interconnectedness of space and place. For Tuan, getting "the 'feel' of a place ... is a subconscious kind of knowing ... which means that we can take more and more of it for granted" (*Space and Place* 184). Tuan also distinguishes space and place from the aspect of movement and stasis: "From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa. Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place" (*Space and Place* 6). According to Tuan, place is essential for one's sense of security and belonging, and it may thus become a point of departure (and return) for one's quest for identity in the alleged freedom and mobility of space. As Karim becomes more and more familiar with the city through movement, his feeling of unbelonging intensifies – London may be his playground but it cannot (at this point) become his 'manor,' a solid base, since the tension between the suburbs and the city, stasis and mobility puts him in an in-between position yet again.

Despite his desperate efforts, Karim finds it increasingly hard to cut all the ties with his suburban roots, especially because his attempts to blend in among sophisticated Londoners are considerably hindered by his being "an ignoramus ... an intellectual void" (BS 177) and by his inability to shake off the "suburban stigma" (BS 134). Moreover, the

¹⁰⁷ Kureishi, for example has been identified in three different ways according to his and his readers' location: "Americans think he's a Brit, Brits think he's an Indian, Indians think he's all Westernized" (Kumar and Kureishi 118).

distinction between urban (metropolitan) and suburban space often turns out to be blurred: Karim experiences racism, resorts to mimicry, and feels directionless on both sides of the Thames. The reason for this blurring is that, according to Wolfreys, in Greater London the borders are “flexible, porous, invisible” due to the fact that the suburb is “protean, malleable, a shape-shifting, amorphous entity,” thus “London comprehends that which it gathers to it, but like the myriad suburbs out of which it has overflowed, [it] cannot be comprehended in its entirety. It is as if the suburbs have, like so many parasites, consumed the host that sought to consume them. London is nothing other than endless little worlds, countless sub-urbs” (*Literature* 100). Consequently, Karim’s efforts to leave the suburbs behind are doomed to failure; whether in West Kensington or in Bromley, he is in-between what he has and what he wants to have, who he is and who he appears to be, and at times he is *in-between* in-between spaces: on the way.

Journeys and nomadic routes

Apparently, Karim does not settle permanently either in the suburbs or in the city, but makes ceaseless journeys between the two. Procter interprets this perpetual motion as “symptomatic of his desire to uproot himself” (*Dwelling Places* 150), while Susan Brook views these horizontal – or rather radial – journeys from the periphery to the centre as “images of freedom and exploration” (220). Karim also makes lateral journeys across the suburbs, between Bromley, Penge and Chislehurst, in search of escape and liberation; I read his perpetual movement as a metonymy of his unstable identity, and his wish to uproot himself; however, even when he leaves the suburbs for the city, he keeps returning home to Bromley, to the magnetic field of his roots.

In Procter’s interpretation, Karim’s constant movement implies that “[d]eparture in this text is never final or conclusive” (*Dwelling Places* 151): when Karim visits his mother in the suburbs, he is reminded of their confining nature and longs for the excitement and freedom of the city: “Although I was only a few miles away over the river, I missed the London I was getting to know and played games with myself: if the secret police ordered you to live in the suburbs for the rest of your life, what would you do? Kill yourself?” (*BS* 145) In contrast, back in West Kensington he yearns for his family and the familiarity of the suburbs: “I wanted to run out of the room, back to South London, where I belonged, out of which I had wrongly and arrogantly stepped” (*BS* 148). Procter views these return journeys as “symptoms

of the narrator's (suburban?) hesitancy, his inability to move on" (*Dwelling Places* 151), which he identifies with a suburban commuter's mentality¹⁰⁸ to leave and return, and which he claims to be reflected in his identity politics inasmuch as "they involve a doubling and displacing identity, 'here and there'" (*Dwelling Places* 154).

Not wishing to rule out Procter's commuter poetics or various other interpretations of Karim's character as a wanderer,¹⁰⁹ migrant¹¹⁰ or *flâneur*,¹¹¹ I nevertheless first and foremost read his journeying as a nomadic movement and his figure as a nomad.¹¹² In fact, even before his 'official' departure from the suburbs for London, Karim refers to himself as an "itinerant" (*BS* 94), a free spirit leading a bohemian lifestyle, setting up makeshift homes at his relatives' and friends': "[T]here were five places for me to stay: with Mum at Auntie Jane's; at our now empty house; with Dad and Eva; with Anwar and Jeeta; or with Changez and Jamila ... I now wondered among different houses and flats carrying my life-equipment in a big canvas bag and never washing my hair" (*BS* 93-4). Being on the road between various locations – Chislehurst, Bromley, Beckenham, Penge, Peckham, and, after moving to London, also West Kensington – Karim marks out his own nomadic territory in Greater London, within which these locations serve as stages in his process of identity formation, as points of endless departures, as temporary resting places on a perpetual and ultimately non-teleological journey: "I was not too unhappy, criss-crossing South London and the suburbs by bus, no one knowing where I was. Whenever someone – Mum, Dad, Ted – tried to locate me, I was always somewhere else" (*BS* 94).

In comparison, in *The Black Album* Shahid's routes in the city consist of two more or less routine paths: one includes Deedee's and her friend's place and various clubs and bars visited for the sake of bodily pleasures, and another between Riaz's room and a council flat in the East End, where the group defends an immigrant family from racial abuse. There is also a third, metaphorical route, which provides a link between the two worlds: Shahid commutes from one location, one situation to the other, swinging to and fro between two ways of

¹⁰⁸ For Procter's study of commuter poetics in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, see *Dwelling Places*, 150-5.

¹⁰⁹ See Jörg Helbig 81.

¹¹⁰ See Nasta, *Home Truths* 181 and Clement Ball, *Imagining* 233.

¹¹¹ See Kuchta, 209. Although Karim's journeys through London do record a variety of places and streets, I do not read him as a *flâneur* in a Baudelairean and Benjaminian sense of the word, since, as opposed to Puppy in *Tourism*, he is neither an insider in the metropolis, nor a detached observer who enjoys the anonymity of the crowd. In fact, Karim often feels directionless and intimidated, and the happiness he derives from urban space is more likely to be that of the tourist or visitor.

¹¹² Procter too remarks Karim's nomadism (*Dwelling Places* 150), while in Romanow's reading Karim as a nomad performs what Hardt and Negri (2001) call "an anthropological exodus," and thus "creates his own map of London and the world" (n.pag.)

belonging and identification. Owing to the constant flux that their journeys entail and the temporariness of their spatial positions, Shahid's and Karim's spatial experience in London gradually turns into what Massey (1993) calls "a progressive sense of place," which perceives places not as "strictly bordered, homogeneous, and self-contained locations" (Schröder 26), but as characterised by mobility and movement. Such a progressive sense of place points to a sense of belonging in a Probynian sense – belonging as becoming and belonging in movement, which Shahid experiences as a Rushdiesque metamorphosis: "There was no fixed self; surely our several selves melted and mutated daily? There had to be innumerable ways of being in the world. He would spread himself out, in his work and in love, following his curiosity" (*BA* 274). Such a sense of belonging differs greatly from "the deep sense of belonging that attachment to place can generate" (Harvey, "From Space" 16), and foregrounds identity as movement and always already hybrid, i.e., a "double belonging" (Maver 51) which, from Stuart Hall's perspective, is "a positionality" (qtd. in Morley and Chen 504).

Shahid's locations point to two contrasting social locations¹¹³ and subject positions as a Muslim brother and as a free-spirited artist/lover, and are shot through with identity performances involving clothing and behaviour. Karim's movement among locations likewise suggests a constant role-play and a shifting among identities: he is an Indian man in Bromley, a working class nephew in Chislehurst, a professional actor in central London, a bisexual lover at various locations, and, inevitably, an Englishman in New York. For split seconds, he is either one or the other, but being constantly on the move, he is somewhere and someone in-between most of the time. As the two protagonists position themselves in various ways of belonging, they develop a mobile sense of place, which, as Tim Edensor asserts, enables belonging to a range of specific locales, each offering a different form of attachment, "familial, political, social, functional, or sensual" (32),¹¹⁴ and, in my view, also allows for triggering various forms of movement in-between and among these locales, as well as the situations and relationships they embody. As Shahid moves around London for pleasure with Deedee in a taxi, takes the Tube back to his "brothers," or walks around Kilburn to get some air and "walk off [his] nervous energy" (*BA* 273), and the way Karim criss-crosses Greater London, their movements display a prevailing directionlessness and restlessness, an inability

¹¹³ According to Neil Smith and Cindi Katz, a social location is one which "gives differentiated social subjects a place to stand, rendering them at the very least visible in their differences" (68).

¹¹⁴ The quotation from Edensor refers to Casey's theory of a sense of place as elaborated in his 2001 essay, "Between Geography and Philosophy" (684-85).

to stay in one place and position for a long time. Karim also appears to be on the move from adolescence to young adulthood, but the teleological logic of this *Bildung* process is constantly undermined by the radically non-teleological nature of his geographical journeys, from one home to another, shifting between identities and locations. Whether perceived as a curse or a blessing, his ability to live at five places simultaneously without being attached to any particular location is an inherent feature of hybrid identity and it points to an existence in permanent mental and spatial fluidity.

Karim's in-betweenness and belonging in movement, his interim homes and routine paths may be understood more clearly in the light of Deleuze and Guattari's nomadology. In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari differentiate their concept of the nomad both from the conventional anthropological definition and from the migrant as the diasporic subject. They argue that the migrant goes from one point to another, "even if the second point is uncertain, unforeseen, or not well localized," while the nomad goes from point to point "only as a consequence" (380); the migrant "reterritorializes on its interior milieu," while the nomad is "the Deterritorialized par excellence" (381). In Deleuze and Guattari's theory the nomad "has a territory; he follows customary paths; he goes from one point to another; he is not ignorant of points" (283); in the nomad's wandering, "every point is a relay and exists only as a relay. A path is only between two points, but the in-between has taken all the consistency and enjoys both an autonomy and a direction of its own" (238). As a nomad and an 'in-betweener,' Karim's life, then, like "[t]he life of the nomad [,] is the intermezzo" (Deleuze and Guattari 284). Karim may also be perceived as a nomad in a Braidottian sense,¹¹⁵ transgressing the borders of sexuality, race, and social roles, repeatedly deconstructing and reconstructing his own identity. Karim exists in "transitory attachment" (Braidotti, *Nomadic* 25), in permanent fluidity, mental and spatial movement: he is on the move from adolescence to young adulthood, from one home to another, in transit between identities, performances and locations. As a hybrid with a nomadic consciousness, his mere being is a metonymy of resistance, the subversion of conventions and dominant discourses on nationality, ethnicity and race (Braidotti, *Nomadic* 5).

¹¹⁵ See Braidotti's theory of the nomadic subject in *Nomadic Subjects*, and a detailed account of her female nomad in chapter 3, where I use it as a theoretical basis for my analysis of *Brick Lane* and *The Glassblower's Breath*.

The transgressiveness that characterises Karim's nomadism may also be detected in Jamila's character, who is, Karim admits, more "advanced" than he is: Jamila has got a "thing about being Simone de Beauvoir," she appears to be very open-minded and conscious when it comes to her sexuality, and, in Kureishi's words, "no one could turn her into a colony" (*BS* 52-3). Although she seemingly gives in to her father when she agrees to an arranged marriage, she does it on her own terms: "Marrying Changez would be, in her mind, a rebellion against rebellion, creative novelty itself. Everything in her life would be disrupted, experimented with" (*BS* 82). Jamila's rebellion manifests itself in her refusal to fulfil her duties as a wife, moving to a commune, having another man's child, engaging in an affair with a woman and creating an unusual family of a husband, lovers (including Karim) and commune members. Karim looks up to the woman her childhood friend has become, and appears to be in awe of her stance against dominant discourses, and her female agency in patriarchal and British society: "Her feminism, her sense of self and fight it engendered, the schemes and plans she had, the relationships ... the things she had made herself know, and all the understanding this gave, seemed to illuminate her ... as she went forward, an Indian woman, to live a useful life in white England" (*BS* 216). Transgressing the borders sexually, socially and culturally as well, Jamila is portrayed as a Braidottian nomad, and as a representative of a new kind of *female* Britishness. As opposed to the stereotypes of ethnic minorities in Britain, Karim's subjectivity, like Jamila's, is one that has little to do with the migrants' displacement and homing desire, nor with their desperate attempts to hold on to their roots; rather, he is a subject with no desire for fixity; his desire is for an identity of transitions and changes (Cf. Braidotti, *Nomadic* 22-3). Karim's *being*, then, is a case of perpetual *becoming* – as Deleuze and Guattari claim, "[t]he nomad exists only in becoming, and in interaction" (430).

The only instance when Karim goes off his routine nomadic path and settles at one location for a relatively long period of time is when he goes to New York with Pyke's production and meets up with Charlie, now an established punk-star selling his Englishness in America. In a flush, Karim decides to stay in New York, and he explains his decision the following way: "There was nothing for me to do in London, and my aimlessness would be eyeballed by my father... In New York I could be a walking stagnancy without restraint. I liked going around the city ... with Charlie ... We were two English boys in America ... this was the dream come true" (*BS* 249). In Karim's experience, New York is thence an even more enabling space than London; apart from offering adventures and pleasures it also provides him with the freedom of sheer existence, a life without the constraints of race and ethnicity

that the dominant discourse in Britain imposed on him – here he is perceived not as an exotic other, or a half-caste but just an ‘English boy,’ that is, he is identified based on his permanent physical location and the concomitant nationality it entails. What I find most ironic about this perception is that both the suburbanite identity he has fled from and the Englishness he is identified with here are place-bound identities (and for Kureishi they are practically synonyms), that is, Karim seems to have returned to the start line here in terms of belonging. On the other hand, while for him the English suburb was the place to move on from and the city the place to move around in, New York does not trigger a desperate urge for further progressive movement or a search for a better place, probably because it is ‘the ultimate city,’ which thus leaves him with no further desires. Being a tourist in New York may involve physical movement but it also provides him with a chance to rest, to stop searching, to appreciate stasis and stagnancy. Therefore, the Big Apple becomes the epitome of nowhere-ness for Karim: he perceives it not as a physical place, but as the embodiment of the opportunity to be no-one and anyone at the same time; it is a state of mind characterised by unfamiliarity, non-presence, unbelonging, the lack of limits and boundaries. As Jay Lutz notes, “[n]owhere depends upon a borderless anywhere for its curious existence and can only express a lack of tangible evidence of somewhere. Some kind of limit has been surpassed whose initial existence has been put into question” (159). Indeed, in New York Karim can surpass all the limits he has experienced in (Greater) London, and thus finally move up and on, both literally and figuratively.

Nonetheless, as Procter notes, Karim stays put, “even as he moves on ... the sheer extravagance of big-city life ... threatens to overwhelm him” and he feels “increasingly suburban” (*Dwelling Places* 152). This is well exemplified by the event when Charlie invites Karim to watch the “sexual bents” (*BS* 252) he wants to try, and Karim feels uncomfortable, which makes Charlie accuse him of Englishness: “[S]top standing there looking so English ... So shocked, so self-righteous and moral, so loveless and incapable of dancing. They are narrow, the English. It is a Kingdom of Prejudice over there. Don’t be like it!” (*BS* 254) Karim is thence “interpellated as provincial, prudish and prejudiced,” which indicates that he “remains of the suburbs, even as he attempts to leave them behind” (Procter, *Dwelling Places* 153) [original emphasis]. Although Karim seems to take this criticism light-heartedly enough, the interlude proves to be crucial in his identity formation as he discovers himself “through what [he] rejected” (*BS* 255); that is, he realises and acknowledges his English/suburban self as preferable to Charlie’s pretences and non-belonging.

Eventually, Karim returns home, back to London and his family, but he does not settle in a fixed mode of existence – his free-spirited, transgressive, dynamic nomadism persists. Although throughout the novel Kureishi portrays Karim as resisting any commitment or attachment, and Karim never admits to himself that his ceaseless wandering and identity performance are symptoms of his desire to belong, eventually he realises that he is very much rooted – not in suburbia as such, but in his nomadic territory of Greater London; he is not a mere suburbanite but first and foremost a Londoner. London, his contentious and ambiguous home, is, in Karim’s words, “where you start from” (*BS* 249), and also the place to return to over and over again. Nonetheless, under the skin of the Londoner’s cosmopolitanism, Karim’s suburbanism is still in his blood; the former could not be possible without the latter, which, according to Brook, provides him “with strategies to reshape himself – as politico, as urban sophisticate, as Englishman in New York” (218) – an urbanite with a nomadic consciousness.

The London Karim returns to seems to have lost much of its charm, it is ugly and loveless, yet he still feels a deep admiration for it and accepts its dual facade just as much as he accepts his own hybrid identity and his paradox feelings:

I could think about the past and what I’d been through as I’d struggled to locate myself and learn what the heart is. Perhaps in the future I would live more deeply.

And so I sat in the centre of this old city that I loved, which itself sat at the bottom of a tiny island. I was surrounded by people, and I felt happy and miserable at the same time. I thought of what a mess everything had been, but that it wouldn’t always be that way. (*BS* 284)¹¹⁶

Although London turns out to be different from what the protagonist has expected, due to his emotional attachment, it eventually comes to be experienced as more a home than a series of temporary locations – his very own “manor” (Cf. *BA* 193). London is the place that he realises he loves to belong to and can identify with in its very vagueness and multiplicity, it is the primary and ultimate location that identifies him: a hybrid space for a hybrid identity, a place of nomadic routes for a nomadic subjectivity. By leaving London and returning to it, Karim has come to value his hybridity; he has learned to accept his directionlessness, as well as the inescapability and inevitability of a nomadic existence, a postmodern “critical consciousness

¹¹⁶ This quotation triggers an association with a scene at the end of Balzac’s *La Père Goriot* (1856), where Rastignac is looking down on Paris from the Père Lachaise cemetery. According to Nigel Harkness, Rastignac’s gaze symbolizes his power and dominance of the city and “maps out his destiny in relation to the city’s public and private spaces” (63). Just as Rastignac’s fate is “bound up with Paris,” so is Karim forever attached to ‘his’ London and thence, both of their destinies are “woven into [these] social text[s]” (Harkness 63).

that resists settling into socially coded modes of thought and behaviour” (Braidotti, *Nomadic* 5). Moreover, by acknowledging London as his marked-out nomadic territory, he can finally locate himself in the world, “reterritorializing and renaming” (Nasta, *Home Truths* 197) the spaces of the city and the suburbs. As both urban and suburban space become the locations of mimicry, performance, hybridity and nomadism, they become the spatial embodiments and metonymies of identity – as we shall also see in Dhaliwal’s novel.

Tourism

Dhaliwal’s protagonist, Puppy, is a young second-generation Punjabi immigrant living and working in London, or rather idly strolling the streets of the metropolis, observing people and places and seeking physical pleasure at various places of entertainment.¹¹⁷ When asked to explain what he is about, Puppy identifies himself the following way: “I’m a tourist...I just look at the view” (*T* 85).¹¹⁸ Although a self-proclaimed tourist, Puppy conforms to what is defined as tourist behaviour¹¹⁹ only in certain respects. Significantly, the only occasion when he really follows the patterns of tourist behaviour is when he is invited for a long weekend to the country house of the object of his infatuation, Sarupa Shah, in the heart of the Cotswolds: “I was on my way to see a bit of real England and was looking forward to it” (*T* 119), he claims. Puppy is streetwise and world-weary, knows his way about in the multicultural metropolis, but he has never really seen the country (usually identified with authentic

¹¹⁷ Although *Tourism* is not an autobiographic novel, the author’s cultural position and experiences as a young second-generation Punjabi immigrant and British Asian cannot be overlooked. In an interview, Dhaliwal suggests that several parallels can be drawn between him and his protagonist, both journalists, aspiring writers and ‘bad boys’: “There’s a great deal Puppy’s gone through that I’ve experienced in one way or another ... ‘Fiction is always autobiography and autobiography is always fiction’” (qtd. in Wollaston).

¹¹⁸ This self-identification echoes the words of another decadent protagonist, namely Michel in the French author Michel Houellebecq’s controversial novel, *Platform* (2001): “[W]hat I really want, basically, is to be a tourist. We dream what dreams we can afford” (20). According to Silvia Albertazzi, “Dhaliwal has never denied his debt to Houellebecq: his views on sex and race as well as his critique of Western consumerism and narcissism are clearly modelled on those of the French novelist” (168). Although both characters engage in some sort of tourist activities, and both display the detachment and shallow interests of the tourist, as well as a postmodern cynicism and alienation, Puppy’s tourism also suggests further connotations of the figure of the tourist, such as that of the ethnographer and the second-generation immigrant as an outsider in his home country – notions that Houellebecq’s novel lacks and that I investigate in this chapter.

¹¹⁹ For theoretical definitions and studies of tourist behaviour see Chris Ryan, ed. (2002), Coleman and Crang, eds. (2002), Sheller and Urry (2004), Bowen and Clarke (2009), and Pearce (2011), among others.

Englishness); his excitement about this first-time experience seems genuine and childlike, also suggesting a desire for an (in)authentic¹²⁰ tourist experience.

Tourism in the English countryside

Puppy explores the countryside with the consciousness and preparedness of both a tourist and a tourist guide, reciting the history and architecture of the village learned from the Internet, studded with the clichés of a Baedeker: “England is a beautiful country and Chipping Campden is the epitome of English rural beauty. The buildings are historic artefacts, protected by law; shops and offices are located in pristine honey-coloured terraces, built with lime-rich Cotswold stone ...” (*T* 120). His excitement and preparations are reminiscent of Chanu’s tourist behaviour in *Brick Lane* – thirty years after his arrival in London, he takes his family on a sightseeing tour, admitting: “Now that we are going home, I have become a tourist” (*BL* 290). Chanu makes careful preparations for the overall ‘tourist-experience’: he buys a pair of shorts, fills his pockets with “a compass, guidebook, binoculars, bottled water, maps, and two types of disposable camera” (*BL* 289); he makes a list of tourist attractions, systematised according to their “entertainment factor” (*BL* 289); asks a passer-by to take a picture of them in front of Buckingham Palace and has a picnic of traditional Bengali food on the lawn of St. James Park. In my view, what Chanu’s and Puppy’s respective tourism have in common is that they both involve a Baudrillardian *simulacrum*: Chanu has a mental image of England as the sophisticated and welcoming mother country of grand financial opportunities,¹²¹ while Puppy’s simulacrum is of the countryside as the core and essence of ‘the real’ England. Apparently, Chanu holds on tight to this simulacrum and consciously refuses to discover the real behind it; he does not experience reality directly, but through what Joseph Boorstin (1961) calls “pseudo-events”: living in an enclosed immigrant neighbourhood and clinging to his traditional customs, Chanu is isolated from Londoners and British culture and finds pleasures in his phantasmatic version of inauthentic Englishness.

Similarly, Puppy’s preparations and superficial knowledge imply that he is in search of the signs of ‘authentic’ Englishness, and he is “reading landscapes and cultures as sign

¹²⁰ While Dean MacCannell compares the tourist experience to a quest for authenticity, a pilgrimage of modern man (593), Daniel Joseph Boorstin claims that it is more of an inauthentic, superficial pursuit of trivial, simulated experiences, a “pseudo-event” (77-117).

¹²¹ Chanu’s adherence to the simulacrum of England as “the promised land” is characteristic of South Asians migrating in hope of financial gain and being able to return home as “a success” (*BL* 35).

systems” (Culler 161)¹²² in search of “the spirit of England” (Kumar 230). According to Ian Baucom, over the past 150 years “Englishness has been *generally* understood to reside within some type of imaginary, abstract, or actual locale” which serves a “nostalgic discourse on English national identity” (4) [original emphasis]. It is exactly this dominant discourse that Dhaliwal’s portrayal of the Shah’s house subverts: the lavish weekend house, which the wealthy Asian entrepreneur owns and occasionally inhabits in this nostalgic and idyllic setting, racialises and hybridizes the countryside by its very presence and thus may be interpreted as the spatial metaphor of the subversiveness of the diasporic subject *per se*. The second layer of hybridity can in fact be detected in the interior of the house, displaying a cultural diversity marked by expensive artefacts and mementos of various cultures, such as “a three-foot high carved Indian elephant,” “a refurbished Queen Anne fireplace,” “a blue-skinned Krishna figure” and “a tall, gilded Napoleonic mirror” (*T* 127) right behind it, as well as an extensive library including the Koran, the Guru Granth Sahib,¹²³ self-improvement books and the works of Tom Clancy and John Grisham, among others. As I see it, the Shah’s house may be read as a diaspora space hybridized both from the inside and the outside, and as ‘invading’ the cultural purity and rural ideology of the countryside by subverting the notion of the country house¹²⁴ as “the cornerstone of rural Englishness” (Agyeman and Spooner 195). From another perspective, however, the Shah’s mansion confirms to one aspect of this pastoralism or rural ideology, which posits the countryside as a nostalgic refuge from urbanism.¹²⁵ The revival of the myth of the English countryside owes much to those condemning the postmodern condition; many city-dwellers started longing for a pre-war idyll and the peacefulness of rural space, hence creating a general feeling of nostalgia towards the country (Cf. Kumar 211-13), which Sarupa’s father (a first generation immigrant) appears to share as well.

In *Anyone for England?: A Search for British Identity*, Clive Aslet highlights the emotional qualities attributed to the English countryside and the notions associated with it: “The countryside is more than just a place, with a physical shape and existence; it is a cultural construct, a product of imagination, which both lives in the English psyche and helps define it. Even to people who do not dwell there, who may never dwell there, it has traditionally

¹²² In *Framing the Sign* (1988), Jonathan Culler analyses the relationship between semiotics and tourism. He claims that tourism is in fact the perception of sign relations, manifested in tourists’ search for the signs of supposed authenticity in terms of cultural markers, behaviour, sights etc.

¹²³ The Sikh Holy Book.

¹²⁴ For Ian Baucom, the country house is primarily a space that “has housed the disciplinary projects of imperialism *and* the imperial destabilizations and re-formations of English identity” (4) [original emphasis].

¹²⁵ See for example Neal (2009).

offered the hope of a more wholesome, safer, less regulated way of life than available in the city” (173). It is exactly this wholesomeness and peace that Puppy hopes to find in the country, and his hope indicates that, in Sabine Nunius’s words, he “has evidently internalised the association of Englishness with a specific type of scenery” as well as “various quintessentially ‘English’ ideas and clichés” (125), thus associating life in the English countryside with peacefulness, health and freedom.¹²⁶ This stance and Puppy’s eagerness to accept the most banal clichés suggest his ambivalent insider-outsider status in England, by implying the contradictory position in, yet resonant perception of, the English countryside by the Englishman and the tourist.

An “ultra-urban homeboy” (*T* 103) “born into city life” (*T* 7), Puppy is used to walking in the crowds and gazing the familiar cityscape – in the country, however, he is ready to accept the clichés and therefore witnesses a “quiet, easy and predictable” (*T* 120) life. Similarly to Karim upon moving to the inner city, in the country Puppy finds himself gazing at a space alien to him both culturally and in terms of class: “The atmosphere here was of complete tranquillity. People walked quietly about their business; unlike in London, they were generally older and unhurried. There was plenty of money here ... history seemed set in the walls; it leaked from the stone, into my thoughts. The aura of these buildings impressed me” (*T* 121). Puppy description suggests that he “unspoilt English countryside” is apparently “the antithesis of the idea of suburbia” (Hetherington 111), of everything that Puppy has fled from, and also the opposite of the metropolis with all its diversity, bustle and familiarity. It is exactly the unfamiliarity of rural space and its “unmistakably class character” (Kumar 211) that draws Puppy to the countryside and enables him to perceive it through the tourist’s eyes and to engage in pleasurable tourist activities.

Although there are several definitions in use, and many diverse forms of tourism, most theories agree on two significant aspects: first, that the tourist is “one who travels for pleasure” (E. Cohen 19), and, second, that the “gaze” is an essential part of tourism practices¹²⁷ and tourist behaviour. Puppy’s behaviour in the countryside conforms to most of the characteristics of the social practices of tourism identified in John Urry’s *The Tourist*

¹²⁶ In *Rural Identities*, Sarah Neal claims that the image of contemporary countryside is made up of two versions, rural idyll and rural crisis. She provides the following list of the characteristics of the former: “intact communities, a sense of community, safety and security, neighbourliness, open spaces, privacy and solitude, reaffirming Englishness and cultural security, timelessness” (5, Table 1.1).

¹²⁷ According to Urry, tourism practices “involve the notion of departure, of a limited breaking with established routines and practices of everyday life and allowing one’s senses to engage with a set of stimuli that contrast with the everyday and the mundane” (*Tourist* 2).

Gaze: Urry defines tourism as a leisure activity as well as a movement towards and sojourn at various destinations outside one's normal place of residence and work, which one intends to return to in a relatively short time (3). Puppy also typifies what Urry says about the tourist gaze, which, on the one hand, is "constructed through signs ... directed to features of landscape and townscape which separate them off from everyday experience" (*Tourist* 3). Puppy, accordingly, begins by noticing and appreciating the features that he has read about – seeing what he already knows. On the other hand – continues Urry – places are chosen to be gazed upon "because there is an anticipation, especially through daydreaming and fantasy, of intense pleasures" (*Tourist* 3). Theoretician Erik Cohen also emphasises the pleasure component of tourism: "A 'tourist' is a voluntary, temporary traveller, travelling in the expectation of pleasure from the novelty and change experienced on a relatively long and non-recurrent round trip" (23). Puppy's pleasure, however, eventually exceeds the joy of recognising something he has seen in a guidebook: in the countryside, he finds both beauty and pleasure at its purest, and not only in the predictable 'touristy' things: besides the landscape and the eclectic and culturally rich interior of the Shahs' house, he also enjoys the beauty and pleasure offered by a lively and loving dog.

The generally aloof, wry and uninterested Puppy seems to come to life in rural space and is also reminded of the roots he has never felt his own: "I felt good. I could smell the country – a healthy gust of cut grass, flowers and dung – and relished it. It reminded me of India" (*T* 122).¹²⁸ What is particularly noteworthy – and perhaps not unrelated to the intimation of India – is the fact that, even though the 'tourist' aspect of the trip reeks of clichés, Puppy's tourism does lead to a genuine experience of bonding with Sarupa:

I was truly at ease with her. The light in her eyes proved that I had nothing to fear. I had always been tense before, too concerned with what she might think of me; as a result, I was over-cocky. Our walk in the country had opened doors between us. We'd talked and laughed; I held her hand as we climbed over gates ... We looked openly into one another's eyes and shared moments of comfortable silence. I knew now that she liked me. I felt secure and unworried. (*T* 191-2)

After having lusted for Sarupa for years, Puppy's dreams finally come true: on the long walk to the nearby village to taste his first ever cream tea (an epitome of Englishness, reduced to a

¹²⁸ In this respect, Puppy's perception of the countryside echoes that of Mrs. Kumar in *Anita and Me* (chapter 1) – the vision and smell of the countryside evoke real and invented memories of the imaginary homeland.

sign), the two of them finally open up, sharing childhood memories and comfortable silences, and eventually making love in an old graveyard. The reason for this unlikely yet natural union, complicated by Sarupa's engagement and social status, as well as Puppy's fear of commitment and belonging, may be the fact that for the first time in years Puppy stops pretending to be something he is not; he avows himself as a Sikh, sets aside his languidity, and places confidence in Sarupa. By doing so, he enables rural space and human relationships to influence his identity formation. Breaking away from his everyday behaviour and practices, Puppy experiences new joys and perceives hitherto unseen beauties on his pleasure trip in rural England; he acquires a sense of belonging in a place other than his home and at the same time becomes a tourist in his own country.

The mask and routes of the tourist

Upon his return to the city, the multicultural space in which he claims to be a tourist, Puppy walks along familiar streets again, gazing at the city and its inhabitants in search of pleasure. Being in his normal place of residence and looking at familiar sights, Puppy's is not a classic case of tourism but a mere identity performance; by claiming to be a tourist, he is trying to give a name to his sense of unbelonging, or perhaps to put on a mask to conceal his otherness and detachment: "I'd have to feel relevant to the world in order to care about it. I don't" (*T* 85), he admits. The mask of the tourist thus signals both Puppy's alienation from people and places, and his inability and unwillingness to belong. It is exactly this unbelonging that may testify the special position of second-generation British Asians and justify Dhaliwal's unusual representation of them. Silvia Albertazzi explains this position the following way: "*Tourism* can be seen as a step ahead in the representation of the children of the Indian diaspora: the young second-generation Asian does not want to achieve success in the whites' world any longer nor does he live as an in-between;" in fact, this new diasporic subject "does not look nor feel any kind of belonging: he just wants to take advantage of the whites, invade their own territory and colonize it by way of using and abusing their women and their things" (169). Puppy's 'tourist behaviour' in London is, then, both a testimony of having moved past the state of diasporic in-betweenness, and a pronounced claim for the privileges of Britishness; it is a state of mind and an attitude; a mask, seemingly manifested in hardly more than constant movement and a reluctance to feel attached to his environment.

To understand the logic of Puppy's routes and metropolitan perambulations, we must look at the point of departure first: for Puppy, the starting point is the London suburb of Southall, a multicultural and diasporic space, close to the metropolis but still on the periphery, an in-between space predominantly inhabited by 'in-betweeners,' first and second generation immigrants (mainly Sikhs) living in closely-knit communities. Puppy, however, fails to experience a sense of community and communion; his satirical depiction of his family already emphasises alienation and a refusal to belong: "Behold!, the Asian family: unit of tradition, moral strength and business acumen. Behold!, my mother: matriarch and fulcrum, proud bearer of sons" (*T* 34). Puppy's family appears to be other in more ways than one: different from the dominant British culture and the traditional diasporic family as well, since Puppy's father has left them, making the mother turn into a religious zealot and enabling her to establish matriarchy as the ruling domestic order.

His mother's insistence on strict cultural and religious rules forces Puppy into the fixed identity of the racial other at school, perceived with fellow Asians as "pariahs for being explicit wogs" (*T* 45), and also triggers the process of alienation, both from his culture and his family. Repelled by a mother who "looked like an animal" (*T* 34) and an "old-world recidivist" (*T* 36) sister, ashamed by his own failure to stand by his naive brother, Puppy's connection with his family is reduced to the financial help he occasionally asks for. Consequently, when Puppy moves to London to become a journalist, he is fleeing both from his roots and – similarly to Karim – the stasis and dullness of the suburbs; he longs for the mobility and anonymity of the city, where he could "lose himself in a crowd" and enjoy "feverish delights" (Baudelaire 20). Thence begins Puppy's perpetual movement between spaces and locations: first by commuting between Southall and East London, then, having set up a temporary second home in Hackney (which proves to be just as downtrodden and stagnant as Southall), by criss-crossing the metropolis. There are two propelling forces for his purposeless wanderings: the pursuit of pleasure and his desire for Sarupa. Setting up makeshift homes and relationships of convenience, Puppy is gradually uprooting himself in a cultural, a social and a spatial sense as well, and deliberately chooses to be a failure, the opposite of all his mother's hopes and "immigrant zeal" (*T* 8).

Uprooted and unbelonging, Puppy finds pleasure in a life without constraints and a self in fluidity, contesting his imposed fixed identity; he abandons his roots and resorts to what he calls tourism, a condition in which "everyday obligations are suspended or inverted" (Urry, *Tourist* 10). His is a deliberate choice of non-attachment and nonconformity: he is

living in a city but not inhabiting it, assimilating to society but avoiding full integration, refusing a fixed identity but applying a Bhabhaian mimicry to fit in (mainly in terms of his appearance), moving from one location to another but never staying for long. The main destinations of his short journeys are places of entertainment and the beds of various women (including a prostitute), making him a so-called “pleasure tripper,”¹²⁹ and at the same time an observer of multicultural space and its inhabitants. Such subject positions do evoke certain aspects of tourism and may explain why Dhaliwal presents his protagonist as a tourist: Puppy is portrayed as striving for social and spatial mobility instead of the alleged fixity of the diasporian, as opting for being a tourist instead of a local. In *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Arjun Appadurai views the notion of being mobile as a self-conscious attempt to shake off rootedness and confinement in place in favour of a modern metropolitan lifestyle, and he claims mobile people such as “explorers, administrators, missionaries, and ... anthropologists” to be outsiders and “observers, ... quintessentially mobile; they are the movers, the seers, the knowers. The natives are immobilized by their belonging to a place” (37). Drawing on Appadurai’s description, Puppy appears to be a mobile subject both in terms of his metropolitan lifestyle and of being a tourist, i.e., an outsider.

Puppy’s identity position as a mobile observer is spatially manifested in his peregrinations in London, his habit of strolling in frequented streets and places, his ‘couch-hopping,’ as well as his regular visits to places of entertainment display typical tourist behaviour. In this respect, his tourism resembles that of Karim of *The Buddha* and Shahid in *The Black Album*, who both wander around London from one club to another, as part of visiting its ‘sights’. Furthermore, Puppy’s individual version of tourism is likewise characterised by directionless wandering and by following routine paths between various locations – his rented flat in Hackney, Sophie’s apartment in Holland Park, his friend Luca’s house in Belgravia, his family home in Southall – which suggest a kind of “local migration” (Nasta, *Home Truths* 181), similarly to Karim’s ‘migratory’ journeys in *The Buddha*. Although upon moving to the city Puppy discarded all the cultural markers of a young Sikh man in favour of a more sophisticated urban look, an essential component of his ‘ navigations’ in the metropolis is taking advantage of his still visible otherness. For instance, in the scene where he visits the prostitute in Victoria, the woman remarks on one of his accessories, a

¹²⁹ Wall’s term refers to a one day traveller who covers a relatively short distance for the sake of pleasure or entertainment (qtd. in E. Cohen 25).

“gold *khandha*” (T 14) hanging from his neck. Answering her question, Puppy reveals that the medal is from India, that is, it is inevitably a cultural marker; yet when she asks “Are you Intian?” his answer is a somewhat hesitant (or even reluctant) “Yeah ... I guess I am” (T 14). In my view, the fact that the *khandha* is associated with Buddhism and Puppy is by birth a Sikh indicates that he has – consciously or unconsciously – picked a misleading cultural marker, more for the exotic look it lends him than for its cultural or religious significance. Here, I join Nunius’s claim that Puppy selects “those elements of his parents’ religion and culture which fit conveniently into his own Westernised lifestyle while simply abandoning other, less convenient ones” (Nunius 136), that is, he only uses selected aspects and markers of his culture which can enhance the appeal of his exotic looks but do not interfere with his mimicry of a sophisticated Western man. Moreover, Puppy’s *khandha* may in fact be perceived as a marker of his tourism – as a souvenir from a country he visited but has no attachment or commitment to. And this is exactly what makes Puppy’s position and figure so ambiguous and exciting: owing to his mimicry in terms of clothing and front, Puppy can adopt an insider status in the city, yet he himself jeopardises this pleasurable status by asserting his outsidership as the tourist.

Wherever he goes, Puppy observes multicultural London and its inhabitants, providing adept ‘non-touristic’ descriptions of architecture and interior design, as well as the native inhabitant’s detailed accounts of the people and places: “deserted council houses” (T 114) and abominable poor white people in Hackney, upper class women in Primrose Hill with “genes refined by generations of monied men marrying attractive women” (T 157) or “the usual Soho crowd: homos, tourists and theatregoers” (T 104). Puppy’s sarcastic description of the Japanese tourists with their dyed hair and quality clothes highlights the differences between the Japanese and the Indian diaspora as follows: “The Japanese are obsessed with Western culture ... and never seem out of place in London, 12,000 miles from home. Indians, even when born here, are rarely so at ease. The West jars with them, and they cocoon themselves with religion, arranged marriages and extended families. The Japanese have an osmotic character ... Indians are less permeable” (T 104-5). The most thought-provoking aspect of this description is that although Puppy clearly distances himself from Indian culture here and seems to model his tourism on that of the Japanese (being different but not out of place), the very fact that Puppy can provide these pieces of information suggests that he is not a tourist in the ordinary sense of an outsider, a temporary visitor, someone who has to use a Baedeker or a guide to get about.

As opposed to Karim and Shahid, who have to discover and map the city they have just moved to, Puppy is a relatively long-time resident of London and clearly knows his ‘manor’ and its inhabitants inside out. He is more of a tourist guide than a tourist, or an anthropologist describing a well-known world, or an “informant.”¹³⁰ Consequently, though he himself designates himself as a tourist, what Puppy does is tourism only in a very limited or partial sense – the tourism of the pleasure-seeker.¹³¹ While in *Brick Lane* Chanu’s tourism lies in the fact that he has never really taken root in London and considers his stay as temporary, in my view, Puppy uses tourism as a mask, as a metaphor of his sense of alienation and outsider status in the eyes of society. Moreover, his self-positioning as a tourist, as a mere observer is, according to Nunius, “intended to validate the evaluation of all other [social and ethnic] groups since – according to his own statements – he is the only one in a position to comment adequately on them because he is not truly involved with any community” (112).

Puppy’s strolls in the streets of the metropolis are those of an alienated, solitary loafer, who enjoys both the pleasures of the city and the decadency of his lifestyle. During his walks, he observes people and buildings, and accompanies his observations with sarcastic remarks and “essentialising, stereotypical associations” (Nunius 111), which he later records in his memoirs. Throughout the novel, he keeps mentioning his walks and observations: “I prowled around Victoria” (*T* 10), “I looked out of the window and watched people walk in and out of a shop across the street” (70), “I walked up the street and around a few corners. I came across a small Bangladeshi tea house and decided to have some lunch ... I watched the artisans and fashionistas of Brick Lane walking past outside” (96). Puppy’s descriptions underlie the statement in *The Black Album* that London “mingled with itself ceaselessly” (*BA* 198). Another similarity between the two protagonists’ urban experience is that they both perceive the city as a labyrinth, a site of adventure and (un)belonging, movement and rest, both a limitless space and a familiar place, where they are visible yet anonymous, and can make human connections but also feel hopelessly isolated from the people.

¹³⁰ James Clifford’s anthropological concept refers to individuals who are “routinely made to speak for ‘cultural’ knowledge ... have their own ‘ethnographic’ proclivities and interesting histories of travel,” who are “insiders and outsiders,” who “first appear as natives,” then as “travellers,” but are in fact “specific mixtures of the two” (19). His theory also evokes Gayatri Spivak’s notion of the native informant as elaborated in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999).

¹³¹ Boorstin argues that as opposed to travellers, who are active and in search of adventure and experience, the modern tourist is a pleasure seeker: “The tourist is passive: he expects interesting things happen to him. He goes sightseeing” (114). In recent tourism studies, the pleasure seeker is defined as a tourist who travels for the sake of pleasure and recreation (see for example Jamal and Robinson, 2009).

These complex experiences and perceptions of the city evoke Walter Benjamin's concept of the modern metropolis. Benjamin acknowledges the "pleasure of being in a crowd" which he perceives as "a mysterious expression of sensual joy in the multiplication of number" leading to the "[r]eligious intoxication of great cities" (290). When Shahid visits places of entertainment with Deedee – especially the end-of-decade and rave parties of drugs and sex – he immerses himself in the intoxicating sensual joys that the city can offer, only to wake up exhausted and grasping for air, "possessed alternately by fear and happiness" (*BA* 71). Puppy is socializing easily and naturally in the various clubs and cafés he visits, yet he does not seem to be comfortable staying long at these places, unless he takes drugs to conform to the general habit of club-goers. In both cases, the drug-induced hallucinations and the sensual pleasures turn London into a "place of delirium," or a Benjaminian "dream city" (W. Benjamin 438; 388), which, according to Neil Leach, is "a form of dreamworld, the intoxicating site of the phantasmagoric, the kaleidoscopic and the cacophonous" (22). In contrast, during his sober wanderings Shahid notices the harsh realities of urban space, which positions London as a Benjaminian "ruined city" (Pensky 125), and, due to both of these experiences, he becomes "bloated but not sated" (*BA* 132), as if he had been "drowning his senses" (*BA* 130). Puppy's observations and sharp comments – often made while walking in the street, drinking in a bar or smoking drugs, that is, in a somewhat intoxicated condition, as if in a state of being 'overdosed' by the decadence of the city – point to the same dichotomy, and evoke Benjamin's similar experience in/of Paris in the 1930s, which he described the following way:

An intoxication comes over the person who trudges through the streets for a long time and without goal. The going wins a growing power with every step. Ever narrower grow the seductions of the stores, the bistros, the smiling women; ever more irresistible the magnetism of the next street-corner, a distant mass of foliage, a street-name. Then comes the hunger. He desires to know nothing of the hundred possibilities to still it. Like an ascetic animal he strides through unknown quarters, until finally in his room which, strange to him, lets him in coldly, he collapses in the deepest exhaustion. (880)

What Benjamin's words imply is a phenomenon that has become known as urban alienation,¹³² defined by Engels (1844) as a "brutal indifference" (37), the unavoidable attribute of the urban hustle and bustle, and the "narrow self-seeking" (37) that characterises individuals in big cities like London. The result, in Engels's view, is the "dissolution of man into monads" (37) – i.e., singular entities unable to 'team up' – and the loss of what is best in human nature: compassion, communal spirit, the human touch. Hundred and fifty years after Engels's experiences, the postcolonial space of the metropolis is still, or even more, characterised by this alienation and rootlessness; on one hand it is a postmodern Babel, polarised and overcrowded, with a cacophony of sounds, odours and identity positions worn like "tags" (*BA* 92), on the other hand, due to the alienation and anonymity urban existence entails, it is both the perfect 'hiding place' for the ethnic other and observing post for the 'tourist.'

In my view, Puppy's comments on London and its inhabitants are those of the detached observer and "the hidden man" – the latter referring to what Walter Benjamin calls the "dialectic of flânerie," a phenomenon when "on one side, the man feels himself viewed by all and sundry as a true suspect and, on the other side, the man who is utterly undiscoverable, the hidden man [M2, 8]" (420). Most of the time Puppy remains unobserved, having managed to blend in by applying mimicry in terms of his clothing, locations and company of wealthy friends, and also because he strives for the anonymity of the crowds offered by the metropolis. As an observer, Puppy loathes being observed, particularly because of the biased comments and perceptions concerning his identity:

I stopped at a pub en route [to Victoria]. It had a mock-Tudor facade, laced with ivy; inside it was dark and sparsely furnished. I walked to the bar and waited to be served. A pack of beer-bellied white men stood in a loose circle nearby; they stopped mid-conversation to throw me a collective, unwelcome stare. Someone mumbled something, probably about me. I avoided their gaze. (*T* 10-11)

Interestingly, while Puppy is perceived as the racial other, his manners – uttering such 'elegancies' as "please" and "no thank you" – eventually win over the locals and he is offered the chance to temporarily become a member of their community, ceasing to be the object of their gaze: "Their smiles beamed 'what a nice boy'. I smiled back at their cracked, powder-

¹³² Urban alienation has been identified and studied by a number of theorists, most notably Georg Simmel, Ernst Bloch, Siegfried Kracauer and, of course, Benjamin. For a thorough study of their theories concerning urban space and the alienation of modern man, see Leach (1997).

dry white faces” (T 11). What makes Puppy’s behaviour and position so ambivalent in this scene is that while he feels othered and despised by the locals, he is also othering and despising them. His scornful words concerning their “ridiculous, inexpensive” looks, their “translucent” whiteness and intellectual inferiority (T 11) imply that even when these people look beyond their first impression and, impressed by Puppy’s manners, are willing to include him as a fellow Englishman, Puppy turns down their ‘invitation’ with a smile, thereby refusing any identification or attachment with them. Indeed, although Puppy walks or sits among people most of the time, he does not mingle with them but keeps a certain distance, remains unattached, inaccessible and irrelevant in the city, which he suggests to be the result of people’s indifference to him: “Several million people were out there, ploughing several million furrows. Barely a handful knew or cared anything about me” (T 168).

The *flâneur* of the postmodern metropolis

Despite his inability to attach or belong, Puppy, as opposed to tourists, is at home in the city, which suggests a more likely association of his character with another form of movement in urban space: *flânerie*. The figure of the *flâneur* was originally used in connection with nineteenth-century Paris, most famously by Walter Benjamin in his analysis of Charles Baudelaire, but has since made its way into postmodern theories as well (Tester 1). The nineteenth-century *flâneur* was a gentleman strolling the Parisian streets in a leisurely way (often with a turtle for an elegant and slow pace), providing “a poetic vision of the public places and spaces of Paris” (Tester 1) as a detached observer. Baudelaire’s *flâneur*-poet “is only at home existentially when he is not at home physically” (399), and his anonymity is “a play of masks” (400) in the crowd. Based on Baudelaire, Benjamin’s *flâneur* is an estranged, solitary stroller experiencing urban space as a sensational phenomenon; he is a product of modern life, an unobserved observer, an invisible yet “all-seeing representative of the modern gaze” (Salzani 46) amid the crowd. Benjamin also emphasises the joyful idleness of the *flâneur*: “Basic to *flânerie* ... is the idea that the fruits of idleness are more precious than the fruits of labor. The *flâneur*, as is well known, makes studies” (453). Puppy’s character can be seen as a *flâneur* in a Baudelairean and Benjaminian sense, manifested in his habit of endless strolling and observing, in an anonymity achieved by wearing masks in the crowd, and in the productive idleness of enjoying and studying the city.

However, certain differences may be detected between Benjamin's *flâneur* figure and Puppy: for the Benjaminian *flâneur*, the arcades served as the primary space for observation; Puppy, on the other hand, haunts public spaces of entertainment where he can observe but be unobserved, hiding behind his sunglasses and the masks of role-play. The Benjaminian *flâneur* was a literary creature and a modern man; Puppy as an aspiring writer lacks the inspiration and creativity to write a novel – though being an aesthete does link him with the late-nineteenth-century *flâneur*. Furthermore – like Karim in *The Buddha* – Puppy is a post-modern man,¹³³ with all his anxieties, alienation and detachment; and his first-person narration posits him as an observer and commentator on the postmodern conditions of metropolitan life. Hence, he may be termed a postmodern *flâneur*, who is enjoying life in the city just as much as he is despising it, due to his own wrong choices concerning pleasures. The relation of choice and joy is also emphasised by Zygmunt Bauman, whose postmodern *flâneur* is a man of choices, who may happen on “the secret of city happiness”, which consists in “knowing how to enhance the adventure brought about by that under-determination of one's own destination and itinerary” (*Life in Fragments* 127). This under-determination can eventually lead to pleasure and freedom, for “the experience of estrangement is lived through as pleasurable” (Paetzold 38). While Puppy's figure may definitely be read as a postmodern *flâneur* in this sense, there is one aspect of Bauman's notion which is debatable: whether his postmodern *flâneur* lacks the potential of reflexion and criticism. Here I join Stefan Morawski, who claims that Bauman's work quite contrarily suggests the possibility of a postmodern *flâneur* with a critical consciousness (186-8), an attribute Puppy clearly possesses.

Puppy condenses many of the features of both the modern and the postmodern *flâneur*, and these features may be said to correlate with some attributes of the tourist, thus creating a multiple identity at the intersection of migrancy, *flânerie* and tourism. Urry suggests a similar link between the figures of the *flâneur* and the postmodern tourist; he highlights the Benjaminian *flâneur*'s anonymity and ability to “travel, to arrive, to gaze, to move on” and acknowledges him as “a forerunner of the twentieth-century tourist” (*Tourist* 138). Bauman, by the same token, emphasizes the tourist's aestheticising gaze: “The tourist's world is fully and exclusively structured by *aesthetic* criteria” (“From Pilgrim to Tourist” 30) [original

¹³³ Here I use the term in line with Vytautas Kavolis, whose post-modern man is characterized by a “decentralized personality.” In Kavolis' theory “the self is experienced in the expanding peripheries, or at the vanishing horizons” and “all elements of behaviour have the same rights” so that “personality must become...disorganized and assystemic” (438-9).

emphasis]. By romanticising the metropolis and its sensational phenomena, the nineteenth-century *flâneur* also becomes an aesthete in his own right, and thus shares the tourist's aesthetising gaze as well.

Nevertheless, the identities of tourists and *flâneur*s do not, cannot merge entirely, as the two terms display a considerable semantic tension. The *flâneur*'s trajectories are made in spaces that he knows well, and within which he happens to find adventure by exposing himself to the romance and randomness of metropolitan life; the tourist, on the other hand, deliberately chooses and visits unfamiliar places, and his adventures are frequently predetermined and guided, and therefore inauthentic. The *flâneur* as a hiding man remains anonymous in his observations; the tourist is strongly visible and identifiable by various physical markers, such as his camera or a map in his hand. For the *flâneur*, observation is a direct physical experience; the tourist, however, may gaze at places indirectly, through various frames, e.g. the lens of the camera or the window of the tour-bus. Puppy's observations are mainly conducted through frames, even though they are markedly different from those of the tourist gaze: a windscreen and a pair of expensive sunglasses as he is driving across London, or the windows of his flat in Hackney and of various bars and restaurants. Interestingly, even when he is not observing people and places through windows, Puppy is still watching 'life' through frames, gazing at David Attenborough "narrating a documentary series on life in the Antarctica" (T 156) or at scantily-clad women in music videos accompanying the experience with smoking drugs. As I mentioned before, Puppy uses drugs frequently throughout the novel, mostly at places of entertainment; as he says: "I can't do clubs anymore ... Not unless I'm loaded" (T 111). His description of the London night-life recalls Shahid's experiences, especially of the White Room, where drugs are an essential part of the 'fun.' However, while for Shahid the state of trance induced by the music and the drugs is experienced positively as the condition of individuality and freedom, and for Karim drugs are an essential part of the physical experience and a direct means to immerse himself in the pleasures of the city, Puppy's excitement has long vanished – he is blighted and bored by the spirit of decadence that clubbing entails. Therefore, numbing his senses with drugs makes him even more alienated from what he sees; by veiling the observed scenes with the blurred visions of drug trips, he is obscuring the view through the frame until it seems distant and unoriginal, thus detaching him entirely from the physical experience.

Puppy's observations through various frames and his pursuit of pleasure trigger further associations with tourism, and particularly with the concept of post-tourism, which has

emerged as a result of a postmodern trend (Cf. Rojek; 1993; Ritzer and Liska, 1997; E. Cohen 2004). According to Urry, post-tourism transforms the “processes by which the gaze is produced and consumed” (*Tourist* 101), and is mainly characterised by the debasement of originality and seeking pleasure in inauthentic, superficial experiences. In Maxine Feifer’s interpretation, the post-tourist may gaze upon places indirectly, i.e. he or she “sees *named* scenes through a *frame*” (Urry, *Tourist* 100): a windscreen, the television or video. Furthermore, for the post-tourist tourism is “a whole series of games with multiple texts and no single, authentic tourist experience” (Urry, *Tourist* 100). As Urry asserts, the post-tourist “delights in the multitude of games that can be played” (*Tourist* 100), is “above all self-conscious, ‘cool’ and role-distanced” and for him “[p]leasure hence comes to be anticipated and experienced in different ways than before” (Urry, *Tourist* 101), or, as Feifer puts it, “he wants to behold ... something just different, because he’s bored” (269).

Puppy’s constant need for diversity and entertainment may be associated not only with post-tourism but also with decadent aestheticism – the intellectual enjoyment of pleasure itself, elevating the pleasure of an unusual pursuit above its sensual experience, above sensual rapture – and thus with the culture of the fin-de-siecle. Throughout the novel Puppy uses the word “beautiful” on almost every page, applying it to everything from people to buildings and antique furniture light-mindedly and generously, thus acknowledging beauty, piling it on and then depriving it of its meaning. It is only in the countryside where Puppy takes a chance at looking behind the facade of beauty and embraces its emotional aspects as well, letting Stan, the dog, and Sarupa close to himself. Back in the city and after years of living intensely, Puppy’s hunger for pleasure and satisfaction can no longer be easily satisfied; he is becoming increasingly blighted and disinterested: “Smoking dope hadn’t been fun in years, but I smoked it anyway: what else was there to do?” (*T* 156) These elements of Puppy’s pursuit of pleasure may suggest a reading of his character as a decadent post-tourist or fin-de-siecle tourist, who is both addicted to pleasure-seeking and repelled by it.

Puppy’s infatuation with Sarupa is equally controversial; it is a permanent source of joy and pain, an elementary lust and – especially in the countryside, where he enjoys their mutual trust – a desperate desire for a spiritual bond, a longing for belonging to someone. Although Puppy still despises his traditional upbringing, he suddenly feels comfortable with and proud of his origins, realising his own responsibility for being unhappy: “I belonged to a remarkable people; this made me proud. My own failings were an anomaly entirely of my own making. If I’d lived by the ethos of my race, my life would’ve been different, so much

better” (*T* 151), he admits. Eventually, however, the feeling of guilt and spending the weekend with Sarupa’s wasted upper-class friends make Puppy ashamed of his roots, manifested in “an absurd jumble of accents,” and his incongruousness, which he describes as follows:

I’d never heard my voice objectively before ... It was an absurd jumble of accents: cockney enunciation and occasional West Indian inflection overlaid a quiet drone from the Punjab ... I was taken aback by how particular I was, how rooted in time and place: everything about me came from the Punjab suburb of West London. I felt embarrassed. I realised how outlandish my presence here was. Everyone else belonged to a milieu of metropolitan wealth, their differences in colour subsumed within a shared order of money. Their lives were firmly aligned. Mine was experiencing just a glancing encounter with theirs, before I ricocheted back to oblivion. (*T* 189)

When Sarupa refuses to continue their relationship, he also feels “so raw, so abject” (*T* 181), trapped by a hedonistic lifestyle and a self-induced sense of failure. Although non-attachment, failure and fin-de-siècle decadence were his own deliberate and conscious choices to live by, it seems that Puppy never ceased to long for genuine happiness, which he hoped to receive from and by Sarupa and which he feels she eventually deprives him of, thus reloading his postmodern spleen and bitterness:

Nothing I’ve ever wanted has come true; I was tired of being let down. I was tired of my own lingering, lifelong sense of incompleteness. I’m a man of few talents; the one skill I have is the acceptance of disappointment. Nonetheless, I lay there feeling drained and beaten. I hadn’t wanted much from life: love, safety, a sense of belonging to somewhere or someone. Instead, I had nothing. I listened to the people around me laughing and joking with one another: was everyone happy, or was everything a shroud, hiding one’s mediocrity and sadness? (*T* 162)

This realisation is accompanied by an unexpected opportunity for change: on what seems to be a whim, Puppy steals the money his friend Rory entrusts him with and flees abroad. Away from his familiar territory, the place which, despite all his efforts, seems to have bound him, Puppy (like Karim in New York) experiences the bliss of nowhere-ness. As he is touring the big European cities, guided solely by “urban habits and a knowledge of Europe based upon its football teams” (*T* 7), he finally feels liberated and calm, yet after a while also “penniless and indifferent” (*T* 8). Travelling with the purpose of sightseeing and

recreation, Puppy ceases to be a *flâneur*; he gradually frees himself of hedonistic desires and uproots himself as a Londoner: “London had been my home for almost thirty years; I’d known nowhere else. She was the gorgeous, faithless old whore that bore me; she’d never shown me any love, but had shown me the world and its workings. For that much, I was grateful” (*T* 240). In contrast with his hitherto superficial, mask-like tourism, Puppy becomes a real tourist, who chooses his destinations after careful deliberation, sets on a journey and gazes at unfamiliar sights. On the other hand, his ‘tourist phase’ does not last long, and his wanderings gradually assume the attributes of a journey or quest: from a non-attached diasporian hiding behind the mask of the tourist, Puppy becomes a traveller, belonging in movement, on a journey of self-discovery.

Throughout the novel, Puppy (ex)changes locations and standpoints frequently and with ease, deploying a wide range of subject positions for his gaze: the social commentator and the tabloid journalist, the informant and the detached observer, the tourist and the tour guide. In the case of Southall, Hackney or Hoxton, he provides an insider’s commentary on the everyday reality of immigrants and the white underclass, reflecting on his own experiences and memories as well. In wealthy neighbourhoods, he remains an outsider, an unobserved observer, although he wishes to be mistaken for a millionaire, “a young dot-com wizard, or an ad-agency creative” (*T* 222), which he hopes to achieve by resorting to mimicry with his clothing (e.g. Burberry shades, Tag Hauer watch) and his location (e.g. Holland Park). Puppy’s roles as a journalist, future entrepreneur, or tourist are all cases of identity performance: putting on masks and thus employing chosen subjectivities as a compensation for not being able, or not wanting, to identify with any political, ethnic or cultural identity. On the other hand, such identity performances – as I have asserted in Karim’s case – may be perceived as light-hearted games, playful try-outs of various subjectivities, and possible aspects of a fluid identity.

It is by the end of the novel that Puppy acknowledges and assumes his own fluid identity: the epilogue takes us to Egypt, the latest destination of his tour, where he is pictured as a relaxed, more spiritual and self-identical tourist-migrant¹³⁴ helping out at a yoga centre. Having spent months “flitting around Italy and then Spain, waiting tables ... labouring in fields and building sites” (*T* 242) and occasionally living off rich women, Puppy finally finds peace in yoga, which helps him realise the value of his mother’s love and generates a genuine

¹³⁴ According to Erik Cohen, tourist migrants “are people who had originally arrived in their host-country as tourists, but decided to stay on, work and sometimes even to settle there” (26)

desire to reconnect with his roots by visiting India: “I want to see the Punjab and the village my mother left ... I want to arrive in Delhi, knowing that this time I will kiss the tarmac, like my mother did, with tears falling from my eyes” (T 245). His words suggest that he definitely does not want to visit India as a tourist, but as a descendant of immigrants returning to his parents’ roots, a location offering a possible sense of belonging. Puppy’s journey, then, is a physical and mental journey transforming him from alienated *flâneur* to tourist, from tourist to traveller. As he needs money for his visit, he plans to return to London – this way, his journey as a tourist proves to be a round trip, which takes him back to the point of departure, only to depart again to further destinations, to the next phase in his identity formation.

After the years-long identity performance as a tourist, Puppy becomes a traveller, but his international travels eventually point back to a tourist identity. As Erik Cohen suggests, “the traveller [should] be viewed as ‘temporary’, and hence as a tourist, as long as he still possesses a permanent home to which he returns periodically or to which he intends to return eventually, even if he stays away for many years” (25). On the other hand, Puppy may be interpreted as a free spirit who cannot be readily defined, restrained or hedged in, and thus his tourism also intersects and merges with a certain kind of nomadism – he becomes the embodiment of deterritorialization (in Deleuze and Guattari’s sense), characterised by a voluntary rootlessness and homelessness, as well as by a conscious nomadic subjectivity. His wandering around the world resembles also those of nomads in an ethnographic sense, who follow routine paths and only settle temporarily, whose “identity is distinct from that of the rest of the society” (Phillips 13), which they maintain by systematic travelling.

What follows is that just as Karim acknowledges his nomadic subjectivity at the end of *The Buddha*, Puppy likewise comes to freeing himself from the constraints of dominant discourse and hegemonic views on identity. On the other hand, while Shahid sets out on smaller tourist trips in the country, and Karim as a nomad continues to live and move around in London, Puppy’s marked territory becomes the world itself. His constant spatial mobility, moving from one location, from one inauthentic experience to another, and his continuous mental movement, changing subject positions and performing identities according to his locations yet never being able to “evade his condition of outsider” (Feifer 271), suggest an immigrant subjectivity at the intersection of tourism, *flânerie* and nomadism, a subjectivity which is both postmodern and uniquely British Asian, and as such it contributes to a better understanding of a multiracial Britain and a new kind of Britishness. Through Karim’s figure, Kureishi calls for an interpretation of national identity as fluid, while Dhaliwal’s protagonist

highlights a significant change both within the British Asian diaspora and its literary representations:¹³⁵ a “post-ethnic” turn which rejects identification based on ethnicity, presents the suburb as “thoroughly ‘urban’” and dissolves old cultural and spatial “demarcations” (Upstone, *British Asian* 210-1).

¹³⁵ Besides *Tourism*, Gautam Malkani’s *Londonstani* (2007), Roopa Farooki’s *Corner Shop* (2008) and Niven Govinden’s *Graffiti My Soul* (2006) are representative of this post-ethnic trend, as well as Atima Srivastava’s *Looking for Maya* (2000), providing a further layer of post-ethnicity through its additional gendered perspective.

Chapter 3

“A long way from home”

Cosmopolitanism, Nomadism and Female Agency in the Emancipatory City

“Diasporic experiences are always gendered,” asserts James Clifford in *Routes* (258). His claim suggests that the study of diaspora and migration from a gender aspect is of crucial importance. In the context of British literature, the increasing academic interest in contemporary South Asian diaspora literature women writers like Monica Ali, Kamila Shamsie, Atima Srivastava and Sunetra Gupta¹³⁶ enables the dissolution of borders between periphery and centre, and draws attention to the gendered nature of migration and relocation, as well as to diasporic women’s politics of belonging in various cultural spaces, and the effects of diasporic existence on their everyday life and subjectivity. The study of diaspora and gender also points to the interrelatedness of geographies (spaces and places) and gender. In Doreen Massey’s view, geography and gender are “implicated in the construction of the other” (*Space* 177), i.e., “space and place, spaces and places, and our senses of them (and such related things as our degrees of mobility) are gendered through and through ... And this gendering of space and place both reflects *and has effects back on* the ways in which gender is constructed and understood in the societies in which we live” (*Space* 186) [original emphasis]. What I find most thought-provoking about Massey’s assertion is the inevitable intertwining of not only space and gender but also of movement, which provides the theoretical background for my subsequent analysis.

The present chapter sets out to map the identity formation of British Asian women in the works of women writers, focusing on Sunetra Gupta’s *The Glassblower’s Breath* (1993) and Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane* (2004), which may be said to represent the two poles of British Asian women’s diaspora experience and offer a gender inflection on many of the themes, tropes of the novels discussed in the previous chapters. The close reading of Gupta’s novel extends and modifies my study of mobile subjectivities analysed in chapter 2 by discussing the figure of the female traveller and cosmopolite, while my analysis of *Brick Lane* revisits several features of the diaspora novel discussed in chapter 1 (thereby, as it were, framing the

¹³⁶ For insightful studies on women writers of the South Asian diaspora see for example Ponzanesi (2004) and Hussain (2005).

dissertation), and looks at how the novel's strong gender perspective sheds new light on diasporic identity formation and how female agency may transform a double subaltern identity¹³⁷ as an ethnic and gendered Other into a multiple feminine subjectivity. The two novels are remarkable examples of the politics of location contemporary British Asian women writers seem to adopt and they also represent the coming of a 'new rule' both from a literary and a feminist point of view.

The title of Gupta's 1993 novel refers to a thirteenth-century poem by Lelaluddin Rumi, "The New Rule," which prefaces the text, and, in parts, echoes throughout the novel itself: "Here's the new rule: break the wineglass/and fall toward the glassblower's breath" (qtd. in *TGB*). The new rule that Rumi proposes is that of defiance, of claiming agency and authority, and it is an underlying concept for much of Gupta's writings.¹³⁸ This politics is manifested in her psychologising narration of mental processes, her richly metaphorical, innovative language and, as Sandra Ponzanesi notes, her "deconstruction of Western myths from a postcolonial and feminist point of view ... to develop new ways of representing women" (94). A central aspect of her poetics and politics resides in her concern with space and location, echoing Virginia Woolf's famous assertion: "[A]s a woman, I have no country. As a woman, I want no country. As a woman, my country is the whole world" (*Three Guineas* 129). According to Caren Kaplan, Woolf's call for a gendered standpoint, "the need for physical place as a matter of material and spiritual survival" (161), was taken up by feminists "to justify the dream of a global sisterhood of women" (161). Thus, "a room of one's own" may be perceived as the metaphor of a new rule, which also triggers an association with what Adrienne Rich called the politics of location.¹³⁹ Rich's term refers to "locating the grounds from which to speak with authority *as* women" (31), and is also used as a marker challenging the alleged homogeneity of identities (Smith and Katz 75) and signalling the formation of diasporic identities (Kaplan 162).

Due to her mixed-raced, Oxford-educated background (and the fact that, although she was born in Dhaka, she was raised in Bolton, lives in South London and does not speak any

¹³⁷ In claiming the double subaltern position of the characters, as well as of British Asian women, I rely on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's theory of the subaltern as elaborated in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1985). For Spivak, the subaltern position necessarily involves overlapping categories of marginalization such as class and gender, gender and ethnicity, resulting in a double subjugation: "If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (28).

¹³⁸ Besides *The Glassblower's Breath*, Gupta has published four other novels: *Memories of Rain* (1992), *Moonlight into Marzipan* (1995), *A Sin of Colour* (1999), and, most recently, *So Good In Black* (2011).

¹³⁹ See Adrienne Rich's "Notes Toward a Politics of Location," her discussion of the ways to conceptualize gendered social locations and of "the need for a spatially scaled sense of social identity" (Smith and Katz 75).

Bengali), Monica Ali has been widely criticised, and her credentials as an authentic representative of the Bangladeshi immigrants of London's East End has been repeatedly questioned.¹⁴⁰ In response to criticism, she made the following claims in an interview: "How can I write about a community to which I do not belong? Perhaps ... because I do not truly belong. Growing up with an English mother and a Bengali father means never being an insider. Standing neither behind a closed door, nor in the thick of things, but rather in the shadow of the doorway is a good place from which to observe" ("Where I'm"). Ali's words, emphasising the liminal place of the (female) diaspora subject, may in fact provide her with a politics of location to write from about the experiences of diaspora women, and also underline her position as a diaspora writer. Sunetra Gupta, as both a member of the Indian diaspora in London and a cosmopolite who has spent much of her life in India, Africa and the US (Williams, para 30), has a profound understanding of the complex relationship of identity and (dis)location and a truly diasporic experience, which, in her case, is embodied in a certain kind of nomadic consciousness; in a claim that is not unlike Ali's self-positioning, she says: "[W]hat I've chosen to do is create a space that is somewhat outside of being anywhere" (qtd. in Williams, para 30). *The Glassblower's Breath* exemplifies Gupta's unique relationship with space and, in Nasta's view, her "attempt to get outside the walls created by the rhetoric of critical ideologies and create a new home and language in the text itself" ("Homes" 97), which may possibly "re-order and reconceive the relationship between language, identity and place" (98). The novel, thus, becomes Gupta's very own politics of location, signalling the recognition that "the relationality of *social* location is inextricably imbricated with the relationality of geographical location" and "implies a redefinition of ourselves" as women (Smith and Katz 75).

Following this line of thought, the present chapter examines diasporic movement and subjectivity by mapping the female protagonists' mental and physical trajectories in space, as well as the accompanying process of their identity formation. I shall argue that the relationship Gupta's heroine has with various urban locations, as well as her movements between and within them, position her as a cosmopolite, a travelling self and a female nomad; while *Brick Lane*, a diaspora novel and a female *Bildungsroman*, tracing a female diaspora subject's identity formation and gaining agency in the "emancipatory city" (Lees), signals and celebrates the emergence of a new kind of gendered British subjectivity, the gendered version of Kureishi's "new way of being British" (18).

¹⁴⁰ For detailed accounts of the Brick Lane-controversy, see Maxey, Gunnig 94 and Hussain 92.

The Glassblower's Breath

Gupta's novel recounts one day in the life of a young Indian woman: her physical and mental movement between various locations haunted by memories of love and death. Hers is a movement driven by lust and a desire to re-write fate, resulting in the collision of three distinct yet at times intertwining parts of her life, which Sushelia Nasta ("Homes" 99) identifies as the physical, embodied in Daniel, the butcher, whom she has a brief impulsive sexual affair with; the emotional, represented by Avishek, the baker, his cousin and first love; and the intellectual, in the figure of Jonathan Sparrow, "itinerant candle-maker" (*TGB* 220), her best friend from college. The novel is told in second-person narration, focalized through the female protagonist; for the most part, the homodiegetic narrator is (probably) the protagonist's husband, the immunologist Alexander, who uses the pronoun 'you' when talking about and addressing the heroine, and 'he' when referring to all the male characters, including himself (Reitan 165). On the other hand, the fact that the husband is not present during the heroine's wanderings suggests the combined use of a number of homodiegetic and heterodiegetic narrators (the lovers), who tell her stories:

And here you are now, in the city of your dreams, in a houseful of mirrors that each scream your story ... Some fissure your gaze into a thousand threads, others curve your smile into cruel rainbowed horizons ... Somewhere, among these, hide the lineaments of your destiny, that you will always search. Yet, every one of them, my love, down to the last looking glass, will tell your tale differently, as we will, my love, all of us who have loved you. (*TGB* 10)

The quotation draws attention to the central concerns and tropes of the novel right at the start: the interconnectedness of space and identity, the mirror as the symbol of (self-)reflection and multiplicity, fate versus (female) agency, love as a means of claiming agency but also of patriarchal control, and, less obviously, the trope of death as well. The fact that the heroine's own experiences and thoughts are filtered through male narrators signals the problematic nature of female agency in the novel: due to the male-dominated second-person narration, the location the heroine may speak from is considerably threatened; yet, by experimenting with several identity positions (as we shall see later), she subverts the patriarchal system, and may even overrule the male/patriarchal voices narrating her story. The "houseful of mirrors," as I shall claim later on, not only implies the multiplicity of perspectives but also that of identity, while the narrative technique signals the authority that these men strive to have over the

female protagonist in an attempt to control her life, to keep her in a subaltern position and a confined space; meanwhile, it also suggests the possibility for the female protagonist to re-write her tale by finding other locations to speak from.

Another fascinating aspect of second-person narration is that it may not only interpellate the female protagonist but the reader as well, putting her or him in the position of a female main character and inviting a gendered viewpoint while reading. However, this gendered viewpoint is strongly controlled by the male narrators, who hardly ever let the heroine ‘speak up,’ and even in these rare instances (e.g. “New York, you say ... ties with Calcutta for my second most favourite city in the world” [*TGB* 105]), her words appear to be a somewhat censored fragment of the heroine’s thoughts consciously chosen and repeated by the male narrators rather than an original, spontaneous utterance – less of a direct than a reported speech. This reportative character of second-person narration is emphasised by Mary Frances Hopkins and Leon Perkins who claim that the “you-utterance is neither command nor accusation, nor yet generalization, but report” (122) and that the narrative ‘you’ is an “an actant by definition ... internal to the story” (121). Being an actant or ‘doer’ in my view suggests to a certain degree the heroine’s agency over the narrative – the male narrators may appear to be omniscient and in control of what is being said, but they have no power to change the course of events. This also means that, although the male perspective may not let the female protagonist’s actual words surface in the text, her actions and various forms of movement speak for themselves and become non-verbal signs of her subjectivity and agency.

Transnational spaces and the traveller self

The heroine’s tale is set at various locations which both define her by the various degrees of attachment and belonging she has with them and liberate her by the very movements made to, from and within them. Born in Calcutta, “the City of Pain” (*TGB* 41), she “would sit late into the evening, in mirrorless, mothstrewn, tropical dark” (*TGB* 43), lonely and isolated from reality in the “marbled halls” of her parental home (*TGB* 14). As opposed to her London house full of mirrors, the mirrorless home (land) does not reflect a myriad of possible identities but suggests one pre-given identity for the heroine, imposed on her by her nationality and geographical location. However, coming from a middle-class intellectual family, her individual identity and experiences of urban space may considerably differ from

those of the average Indian/Calcuttan. On one hand, owing to her class status, she is shielded from the harsh realities of the metropolis: the poverty, illiteracy, and immobility of its slums; on the other hand, from the point of view of intellectual and personal growth, the city has nothing to offer but “the meagre advantage of an exotic past which you have exploited so shamelessly in your prose” (*TGB* 225), as well as a situatedness generated by location, locale and an allegedly stable identity, un-mirrored, singular and restricted to fixity. Therefore, the young protagonist and her father’s immigration to Birmingham becomes a means of escaping the “festering,” “decaying city” (*TGB* 41, 225) for the sake of knowledge – a journey to discover further aspects of their identity.

Being a young child, the heroine’s experiences of migration are mainly restricted to the feeling of loneliness, although, as one of the narrators recalls, “You knew how to amuse yourself, perhaps that was why your aunts had agreed that your father take you with him to the lonely chalk shores, to grow alone into adolescence” (*TGB* 61). This quotation has several implications in terms of the knowledge of both the narrator and the writer, and concerning the motivations for and consequences of the heroine’s migration. First of all, it must be noted that the narrative does not detail the family’s immigrant years or provide the usual accounts of their experience (e.g. the feeling of displacement, rootlessness, homing desire), which may be because, unlike many of the first generation immigrants portrayed in the previously discussed novels, Gupta’s characters are predominantly not economic migrants but appear more as travellers who intend to discover a new culture out of curiosity and a hope for enlightenment – which is an inversion of the occidental mystique of travelling to exotic places as a means of the traveller’s self-discovery. On the other hand, although it is the author who indirectly speaks here, these are the male narrator’s words, which may signal his limited knowledge: he obviously cannot know everything about the heroine’s past, and even the knowledge he possesses is necessarily conjecture or second-hand, coming from the heroine, that is, in an indirect way she becomes a co-narrator of her own story, the story that the male narrators strive to take hold of and control by telling it to the heroine, that is, they claim authority over the narrative and, by extension, the female protagonist as well.¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ In their influential feminist study, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1984), Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar make the following claim about the connection between authority and gender: “The roots of ‘authority’ tell us, after all, that if woman is man’s property then he must have authored her, just as surely as they tell us that if he authored her she must be his property. As a creation ‘penned’ by man, moreover, woman has been ‘penned up’ or ‘penned in.’ As a sort of ‘sentence’ man has spoken, she has herself been ‘sentenced’: fated, jailed, for he has both ‘indited’ her and ‘indicted’ her. As a thought he has ‘framed,’ she has been both ‘framed’ (enclosed) in his

Secondly, the female protagonist's memories here are also considerably influenced by her father's immigrant experience, thus the account of their migratory movement may possibly be viewed as filtered through a triple perspective – *the father's* experiences as perceived by *the daughter*, then passed on in parts to and reported by *the narrators*. In light of this, it is well worth considering the following lines that discuss the father's motivations for migration:

It was only in his later years that he had come, ostensibly in the pursuit of higher education, to Birmingham, leaving behind your sister safely settled at school, he had arrived with you, his younger daughter, to these long sought shores, lands that he never might have seen save in the shifting moods of Hardy's moors, Wordsworth's impoverished clouds. And you, his daughter, had inherited this horror, that others affectionately dubbed wanderlust, it was this horror ... that had driven you from your city, compelled you to rip away the bonds of stone and sweat and travel heedlessly into the unknown, lest you too become trapped in that disgrace of knowing more than you had seen: a madwoman in the attic, furiously scratching tales of vicarious misfortune. (*TGB* 42)

The quotation implies three important aspects of the heroine's identity in relation to movement. Firstly, Gupta's intertextual reference to the raging madwoman may point to the works of several nineteenth-century women writers¹⁴² depicting madness as a psychological response to patriarchal control. By juxtaposing madness and travelling, the latter may be perceived as the manifestation of a desire to break free from the confines and restraints of patriarchal society, and of the possible means to achieve female agency and an individual feminine identity, which is underlined by the female protagonist's free-spirited, transgressive nature, most visible in her attitude to love, marriage and adultery. However, this interpretation does not take the possibility of a triple perspective into account and suggests a strong female voice which is not present in the novel – after all, it is the male narrators who tell the heroine her story; the protagonist's perspective may influence that of the narrators but is more likely to be 'stuck between' or overwritten by those of the father and the male narrators. Therefore – and this is my second interpretation – since the heroine's desire to travel is proclaimed to be

texts, glyphs, graphics, and 'framed up' (found guilty, found wanting) in his cosmologies ... The etymology and etiology of masculine authority are, it seems, almost necessarily identical ... both patriarchy and its texts subordinate and imprison women" (13).

¹⁴² The most well-known examples include Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1864) and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892), which I shall reflect on later on in this chapter.

not innately her own, but “inherited” from the father, the madwoman reference may also be read in terms of the father’s apparent interest in romantic English literature and his wanderlust (his appropriation of a western conception of travelling) and thus as the signifier of a female identity condemned to stay put, to be static, unmoving and unmoved, like Tennyson’s (1842) *Lady of Shalott*, who eventually chooses death over being isolated from the rest of the world.

Owing to the triple perspective in action here, it is difficult to decide whether this intertextual reference to the “madwoman in the attic” actually comes from the father, or is made by the heroine later on, as a reverberation of her childhood experiences and influences, or whether it is the narrators’ choice to describe either the female’s protagonist’s restlessness (referring the *Lady of Shalott*) or her defiance (referring to the feminist trope of the raging madwoman).¹⁴³ Although the phrase as quoted here may evoke the figure of the *Lady of Shalott* more strongly, in my view it may also be a reference to Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* and, as a tribute to postcolonial women’s literature, to Jane Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), in which Bertha’s madness is inseparable from the fact that she was forced to travel and live in an alien cultural space. In some respect, Gupta’s heroine becomes an immigrant by coercion as well; yet, she does so with an inverse result – in her case it is the prospect of stasis which is maddening, while travelling turns out to be liberating and enlightening. One could argue that Gupta’s reference to the “madwoman in the attic” may be directly linked to the rich and highly controversial tradition of the trope of the madwoman. Nonetheless, the father’s wanderlust, a romantic male position as it is, has inevitably had a great impact on the daughter and thus, in my view, has also eventually contributed to her wanderlust as a form of a female agency. By extending the madwoman metaphor and its implications to diasporic consciousness, the heroine’s desire to travel may thus point to the need for movement as a means of self-discovery (a search for identity), as well as for an existence in movement as a form of diasporic subjectivity (a mobile subjectivity) and, by extension, back to an individual female identity, defiant and autonomous, with a distinct female agency.

While the heroine’s unfolding tale points increasingly to a certain feminine *diasporic* subjectivity, the father’s perception and preliminary images of England posit him rather as a *colonial* subject yearning to return to the ‘motherland.’ Monica Fludernik refers to such characters/individuals as “travelling Indians,” who, due to their colonial British education, possess “romanticized versions of England ... on their exotic, ‘occidental’ other, thereby

¹⁴³ Gilbert and Gubar (1984) provide a comprehensive feminist study of the “madwoman in the attic;” for various responses to their theory see Federico (2009).

inverting the orientalist gaze and subjecting England to an inauthentic stereotyping” (81-82), in this case, based on literature. Similarly to the female protagonist’s father, Chanu of *Brick Lane*, a diaspora subject in England, appears as a colonial subject visiting the motherland. With a degree from Dhaka University and various certificates received in England, Chanu is introduced as an educated man, feeling and acting as superior to the working class Bangladeshi of the community. He is the figure of the *babu* (an anglicized clerk during the Raj),¹⁴⁴ and as such he is the embodiment of colonial mimicry: a great admirer of English literature, a *pukka* [genuine] Englishman in terms of his clothing and language, yet an imperfect reflection of his former colonizers. His appearance and behaviour point to a mimicry which is not necessarily a sign of assimilation or a defensive strategy to avoid racism, but a tool to conform, to blend in; it is an imitation of a simulacrum of Englishness. Although his travels only take him as far as London, his figure corresponds to that of the father in Gupta’s novel, a travelling Indian by definition. What traveller-migrants such as these two characters go through is not a desired enculturation at the heart of the world that has provided their education, but an unavoidable acculturation in an alien host country, which constructs their identity as British-Asian or, at best, cosmopolitan. The latter may apply to wealthy diasporans with the possibility to travel extensively and settle temporarily at several urban locations, thereby constructing a certain travelling identity. For Clifford, the concepts of travelling identities, travel and displacement represent the fluidity of (social) identity, a cosmopolitanism which disrupts spatial boundaries and, in Smith and Katz’s words “moves us beyond the fixity of singular locations” (77).

The cosmopolitanism of father and daughter – the third possible interpretation of the identity of the latter – may be underlined by their wanderlust, that is, their desire for authenticity, discovery and adventure, manifested in perpetual movement in and towards unfamiliar places and spaces. In tourism studies, wanderlust is defined as a “spirit of serendipity” in the traveller, which is “born out of a yearning to acquaint oneself with the unknown – physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually” (Singh and Singh 138). The term wanderlust, which, according to Online Etymology Dictionary, was coined in 1902 and is a loanword from German meaning “desire for wandering,” is linked to German Romanticism and its vagabond literary heroes of “rootless, restless” character (Cf. Gish, 1964;

¹⁴⁴ For a historical study of the figure of the *babu* see Ratté (1995), while for its use in literature see for example Gibson (2011).

Cusack, 2008).¹⁴⁵ Since rootlessness and restlessness are attributes of western traveller-migrants and travelling identities, the heroine's fear of ignorance and wish to avoid knowing more than she had seen may also indicate that the yearning to explore other places is also a yearning to discover the self or other selves, to leave the 'mirrorless' family home and thereby find the opportunity to view herself as reflected in other mirrors, that is, in other situations, localities and in relation to other people. Whether due to the termination of the father's studies, to homesickness or disappointment with England (possible reasons which the novel does not reflect on), father and daughter return to India after a few years. Nevertheless, wanderlust continues to play an important part in the heroine's life: pulled by "the magic of a foreign land" (*TGB* 156), she goes to college in New Jersey, where she experiences "the disorienting weight of the vastness to the West, the uneven pull of the great mass stretching to the Pacific" (*TGB* 163).

Besides temporarily satisfying her wanderlust, America offers the female protagonist a different sense of space from the one that she has had before. In contrast with the crowdedness of Calcutta and her isolation in Birmingham, which may have both generated a sense of space as restricted and suffocating, the vastness of the land in the USA evokes the sense of an open space as the Western symbol of freedom and opportunities that "invites action" (Tuan, *Space and Place* 54). Indeed, it is during the college years that the heroine makes friends with Sparrow, with whom she experiences the freedom to try out new identities and wandering/travelling freely, and she also manages to break the love-spell his cousin had cast on her for years, thereby liberating herself from the burden of pain and sorrow, which she projects onto her native Calcutta. On the other hand, her 'spatial liberation,' that is, her breaking away from enclosed places and constricting locations, which goes hand in hand with her sexual liberation (manifested in a brief affair with an American fellow student) involves the danger of being driven by lust rather than wanderlust, and thus becoming emotionally constrained (as opposed to her feeling that, having "severed all links with the miserable athlete, the ridiculous David, life now stretched limitless before you" [*TGB* 30]). According to Tuan, "[t]o be open and free is to be exposed and vulnerable. Open space has no trodden paths and signposts" (*Space and Place* 54). Sexual liberation thus may be viewed here as the metaphor of open space as freedom and freedom as "a threat," (Tuan, *Space and Place* 54), while the open space of America and college life provides alternative paths for the heroine: the unrestricted and not pre-determined routes of the traveller self, and the dangerous, curvy

¹⁴⁵ For an excellent study on the gender aspects of the romantic myth of travel see Mary Louise Pratt (1992).

roads of a woman in love. When the female protagonist meets her future husband, Alexander, with whom she will settle (both physically and emotionally) in London, she unknowingly exchanges the former for the latter, inasmuch as she risks becoming the object of a man's desire yet again and thus being subject to the "oppressive containment" (Tuan, *Space and Place* 54) of this desire.

It must be noted here that, although compared to the transgression adultery entails in contrast to the static commitment of marriage, the heroine's relationship with Alexander initially appears to be neither physically nor emotionally restricting. Apart from the very day the heroine wanders around in London with the butcher, she is also mentioned to be on several outings with Avishek when she would "drive out with him to the country, or simply laze in some London park" (*TGB* 46), that is, she might not leave England on her own, but she is decidedly free to roam around in London and the surrounding area without having to report her deeds to her husband. On the other hand, the liberal values and nature of their relationship are questioned and the dangers inherent in the husband's possessiveness are foreshadowed when, for example, one of the narrators is contemplating the possible scenario of the heroine revealing her adultery: "Will you tell Alexander, will he not merely laugh ...? ... [He] will shake his head and smile, well, don't run away with him, my love, you know I would kill myself ... more likely I would kill him, I suppose, he will say, laughing" (*TGB* 212).

Before the relative physical stasis that her marriage and settling in London involves, America offers her a chance to indulge in various forms of movement in transnational (urban) spaces: walking among the "Gothic arches" of the campus and the "snow fields of your youth" (*TGB* 58); commuting, i.e., "ferrying back and forth from New York to New Jersey, the three of you living mainly in Vladimir's mother's apartment, returning to college only for the odd lecture" (*TGB* 135); and travelling to London and Paris with Sparrow as tourists, the latter journey compensating for the briefness of a childhood visit which made her feel that "the anguish of coming so close to seeing Paris, and not seeing Paris, became as romantic as having seen Paris" (*TGB* 107). The heroine's images of these metropolises evoke their perception as transnational spaces, which are both "the *material geographies* of labour migration" and "the *symbolic and imaginary geographies* through which we attempt to make sense of our increasingly transnational world" (Jackson et al. 2-3) [original emphasis]. Transnational spaces may be occupied for a short time, as is the case with tourism, or

inhabited for a longer period as immigrants/temporary residents, roles which the heroine of *The Glassblower's Breath* all performs as a student. The novel's portrayal of entering transnational space as tourists and temporary inhabitants makes it a pioneer of diaspora novels of mobility and movement, such as *Tourism* and *The Buddha of Suburbia*, and also the precursor of the post-ethnic novel (Cf. Upstone's *British Asian* 210-1) by offering alternative ways of identification for the diaspora subject. The travelling immigrant's movement to and within transnational spaces may offer the feeling of belonging nowhere and everywhere at the same time and thus lends itself to the formation of a cosmopolitan identity and a mobile subjectivity, calling for the reconsideration of traditional ways of belonging and rigid conceptions of home.

Two of the several transnational trips the female protagonist takes during her years at college take her back home to Calcutta, to her alleged home and roots. Whenever she returns to her birthplace, she realises the "inadequacy" (*TGB* 14) of her relationship with the city, which makes her decide to finally get to know it by wandering; as the narrators recall, "you scoured the city for all that had been hidden to you, returned always disappointed" (*TGB* 109). The reason for the heroine's disappointment may in fact lie in her changed concept of home – having lived in England and the USA for years and travelled to various other locations, she has both lost touch with her birthplace since her "acquaintance with the city had been hopelessly inadequate" (*TGB* 39), and experienced what Clifford calls "traveling-in-dwelling, dwelling-in-traveling" (*Routes* 36), an alternative attitude and sense of belonging to a place. For Clifford, travel and travelling identities dissolve spatial boundaries and suggest "social, political and cultural identity as an amalgam, the intricacy of which defies the comparative simplicity of 'identity'" (Smith and Katz 76).

When the narrator compares one of the heroine's journeys to a "pilgrimage that filled all crevices of their existence" (*TGB* 79), his words imply the necessity of movement in identity formation and point to Victor Turner's (1973, 1974) concept of pilgrimage involving *rites de passages* in the act of movement. For Turner and John Urry, rites of passage proceed in three stages: "first, the social and spatial separation from the normal place of residence and conventional social ties; second, liminality, where the individual finds him/herself ... out of time and place ... and third, reintegration ... with the previous social group" (*Tourist* 10). In the case of Gupta's heroine this final stage does not take place; yet her migration and transnational travels indeed involve separation and liminality, as well as "an attempt to

identify and place the self” (Parsons 41). Through her travels, the heroine takes up various identity positions as immigrant, student, tourist and traveller; daughter, friend and lover; Indian, diaspora subject and tourist – positions which signal an unavoidable process of identity formation in, and due to, both movement and various locations “as a part of travel, as entailing movement or multiplicity” (Kaplan 168). What follows is that the female protagonist’s supposedly fixed cultural identity as Indian becomes fluid, enriched by layers and layers of new selves and identity positions, developed at a number of locations until the notions of both identity and home become multiple and subject to change, indicating Doreen Massey’s positionality (being “of and in a space, while at the same time not quite belonging to it” [Puwar 7]) and a Probynian belonging (belonging as becoming and belonging in movement). Furthermore, Gupta’s heroine’s embodies a cosmopolitan identity which is constructed not only in a series of different spaces but predominantly during travel in-between and within these spaces.

Since her hometown loses its status as the primary and sole place of her belonging, the female protagonist’s attempts to reconnect with the city are not those of an immigrant returning home after years of self-imposed exile, but of a second-generation diaspora subject visiting his or her parents’ roots. As she walks around Calcutta for hours, “sandal-footed, in the stark heat brine” (*TGB* 14), discovering its previously hidden face, she has a sense of alienation, which is further intensified by gazing at the city through the lens of her camera, and which forces her to face the fact that she is isolated from and rejected by the city of her birth that she “had longed to love” (*TGB* 40). The heroine displays several basic characteristics of tourist behaviour here, starting out with her relatively short stay, walking and getting to know the city, and her tourist gaze mediated through a frame, i.e., the lens of the camera. Her tourist behaviour in the city of her birth is, however, by no means a leisurely activity; it signals a detachment from the place, both physically, as a result of her immigration and transnational travels, and emotionally, by equating the city with her painful memories of love lost. Her inadequate knowledge of and ambivalent emotional relationship with the city thus renders it impossible to love, to belong to, to call home. Although the heroine has roots to return to, the city is no longer *the* home, but one of the many locations that serve as temporary abodes for her travels, a transitory and transient place, that is, a location in and generating motion – *a* home among the many for her cosmopolitan self.

The female protagonist's tourist behaviour and movement in urban space exhibit several similarities with Puppy's identity performance as a tourist in Dhaliwal's novel and thus casts doubts on the authenticity of her behaviour. Just as Puppy's tourist self is a mask hiding a diasporic *flâneur*, her tourism might be seen as the mask of the diaspora subject no longer at home in her place of birth. And this is where the difference is revealed: while Puppy's identity performance betrays a complete non-attachment to place – to any place, for that matter – the heroine of *The Glassblower's Breath* behaves like a tourist because of her detachment from one particular place, her hometown. Yet, as her relationship with the other locations in the novel reveals, she does have certain emotional ties with several cities: she claims Paris to be her favourite city, the place to go to when she gets “tired of London” (*TGB* 107); while New York “ties with Calcutta for my second most favourite city in the world” (*TGB* 105), and she has an ambivalent, yet decidedly emotional relationship with London, “city of your combined dreams” (*TGB* 10). The female protagonist's emotional ties suggest that she has not only got to know but also learned to love these places, that is, what she refuses is not attachment to place *per se*, but being attached to, and characterised by situatedness in, one fixed place, the place of her origins. Contradictory as this may seem, detachment and multiple belongings may prove to be correlative categories in her case: due to her perpetual movement between and within various places, to a certain extent she has developed a sense of belonging to all of them – as opposed to the unhomeliness of her native city, the homeliness of the city as such means that each of them could be her home but none of them really is. This way, I argue, she extends Puppy's (post-)tourism and postmodern *flânerie* to what Deborah Parsons refers to as “international flânerie” (14), in other words: cosmopolitanism.

Although Parson's study focuses on modernist cosmopolitan identity, her findings are applicable to Gupta's contemporary character, whose cosmopolitan identity involves a detachment which “works against social participation and agency” in her native city, while her wanderer self away from Calcutta “never escapes completely from the cultural systems of [her] origins (be it class, gender, or national identity)” (Parsons 14). Apparently, throughout the novel the heroine's cultural identity is presented as both undoubtedly Indian and noticeably cosmopolitan. Since cosmopolitanism “foregrounds mobility” (Shukla 230), these joint ways of representations point to her identification as a “travelling Indian,” the member of a cosmopolitan diaspora elite. Despite the fact that the notions of national identity and cosmopolitanism may seem contradictory and irreconcilable, the definition of cosmopolitan as

an elite traveller¹⁴⁶ “focused on novel experiences and incapable of forming lasting attachments and commitments” (Bhimji 17) is generally accepted in, and frequently applied to members of, Anglophone societies, suggesting the possibility of this duality.

The most significant aspect of the heroine’s cosmopolitan identity here is that it is gendered, and thereby, by implication, it challenges women’s outdated identification with private and domestic space as opposed to the male privilege of appropriating public space and travelling abroad.¹⁴⁷ In her insightful study of women’s place and position in modernism, Parsons challenges the exclusivity of this male privilege and argues for the presence of the female urban walker and observer, “for whom the city operates not just as a setting or image, but as a constituent of identity” (7) and who is characterised by a “desire to escape the confines of the domestic environment, coupled with a wanderlust expressed through forays into the city” (27). Transplanting Parsons’s figure of the modernist *flâneuse* into a twenty-first century postmodern context may give birth to the female cosmopolitan diaspora subject manifested in Gupta’s heroine, whose national identity is manifested in roots, diasporic identity in location, and cosmopolitanism in movement, thereby constituting separate yet correlative parts of a multiple and fluid identity. Since she is searching “not for a place but for self and identity” (Parsons 41), I interpret her story not as an ethnic but as a female *Bildungsroman*.

Cosmopolitanism and transgression

As a transnational space and cosmopolitan metropolis, London initially appears to be an ideal place to settle in, yet, the house Alexander and the heroine live in clearly displays an irresolvable contradiction between cosmopolitan lifestyle and home as a fixed location. With its “mirrored hallway, a mirage of plaster icing,” the house is described as a “palace of kitsch” (*TGB* 67),¹⁴⁸ a “voluptuous hostelry,” an “ornate parody of Victorian opulence that fills the

¹⁴⁶ See for example John Urry (*Consuming Places* 2000) and Mike Featherstone (2002). For an opposing view, see Pnina Werbner (2008), who claims that cosmopolitanism is vernacular and includes the working class as well.

¹⁴⁷ See for example Thacker (2003) on the modernist notion of women’s place in domestic space, as well as Massey (1994), and Briganti and Mezei (2012).

¹⁴⁸ It is interesting to compare this description, as well as that of Alexander’s study as a “mirrored retreat” (*TGB* 8) to Luce Irigaray’s argument on the power of public men (based on the figure of Winston Churchill), whose fantasies of power are reflected all his surroundings, in language, emotions, and dwellings alike, thus making up

inflexible spaces of your existence” (*TGB* 6). Such descriptions on one hand indicate the lack of cosiness and human attachment to the building which could turn a house into a ‘home;’ on the other hand, they suggest the transitory nature of the place: perceived like a hotel, the house appears as a temporary location, a place of transit for the heroine: it is merely one abode among the many in her transnational migratory movement, the ‘non-final’ destination of her wanderlust. The narrators recall the heroine’s journey in the following way: “You have come a long way, my love, a long way from home, you have found your way into a houseful of mirrors that each tell your tale, but none as well as you might have, if you have looked within, instead of among your myriad reflections, for the shape of your destiny” (*TGB* 42-3).

The quotation has several implications in terms of both identity and space. On the first level, its reference to transnational migratory movement suggests the loss of home but also the legacy of it, “roots and routes” (Clifford, *Routes* 6) as reflected in the diffracting mirror of diasporic consciousness. On another level, “a long way from home” indicates the change in the female protagonist’s concept of home; which points to Mary Douglas’s assertion: “Home is located in space but is not necessarily a fixed space” (289). Furthermore, the heroine’s perception of both Calcutta and the London house evokes the notion of the Freudian “unheimlich” (Cf. “The Uncanny,” 1214-34): the former transforming from homely to unhomely, the latter lacking cosiness and intimacy, and, even entailing the possibility of what Douglas views as “tyrannous control and scrutiny” (287), since even its “most altruistic and successful versions [of the home] exert a tyrannous control over mind and body” (303). Although the presence of this tyranny and its fatal consequences are only revealed at the end of the novel, the London home, “ghostly dim in the early morning light” (*TGB* 6) appears uncanny right from the start. What follows is that in their respective ways both ‘homes’ may in fact generate the heroine’s spatial fear, movement and cosmopolitanism. Choosing migration and urban walking instead of the stasis and fixity of a location suggests that, in Jogamaya Bayer’s words, “the unfamiliarity of the foreign is preferred to a home that has become uncanny” (41) and that movement is appreciated precisely because of the unfamiliarity of the places and situations it may bring the heroine to and the freedom that such uncertainty entails. Movement here is also highly important from a mental point of view; the metaphor of being “a long way from home” also suggests a move away from the idea of home, as well as from a single fixed (national or local) identity to a multiple and fluid

a “palace of mirrors” (*Speculum* 137). For an overview of Irigaray’s theory and a detailed analysis of the relationship of space, gender and the mirror see Puwar, 17-19.

identity, her “myriad reflections.” On the fourth level, these reflections may also be interpreted as the different images the men in her life have of her and their respective claims to shaping the destiny of the woman who refuses to be controlled by fate and to be pinned/ “penned” down by merely one way of identification. In this way, the multitude of reflections are not only the metaphor of the multiplicity of identities, but also the compound of her several selves as reflected in their eyes.

For Alexander, his wife is “a delectable mirage, an abandoned myth” (*TGB* 45), which implies that he both fails to grasp the multiplicity of her identity, and is afraid of his own failure to possess her due to the fluidity of her identity. Avishek, for whom she is (or should be) “bride of the underworld” (*TGB* 203), clearly relies on the traditional Western concept of woman as death¹⁴⁹ for her characterisation. Such a perception is underlined and further complicated by the narrators’ portrayal of the heroine as “an unanchored soul, a rootless being” (*TGB* 40), which, besides referring to her diasporic identity, may also suggest that she is not a living person but an entity out of this world. The narrators’ characterisation of the heroine projects an image of a mysterious and fatalist creature; he claims (or they claim) that she has “a taste for fantasy,” and a “desire for destiny” (*TGB* 93); a “need for pain” (*TGB* 186) and an “addiction to the absurd” (*TGB* 203); with an identity split by lust and “disastrous insecurity” (*TGB* 214). These descriptive phrases emphasise the instability and dark sides of the heroine’s character and may signal not only her own internal conflicts and uncertainties, but also the ones she generates in the men. On the other hand, due to obsessive desire of the narrators, which (as I have claimed earlier) is also manifested in their control over the narrative and their fixation to ‘pen her up or in’ (Cf. Gilbert and Gubar 13), the heroine’s characterisation here perhaps reveals more about the narrators’ reliance on patriarchal myths than about her actual personality. However, it is Sparrow who, though likewise influenced by these myths, probably best conceives and sums up the female protagonist’s fluid identity:

[A] month after you had met, he had told you ... that within you, he saw qualities of the undead, of a spirit that had travelled vast lengths of time, accumulating experiences that there was none left to share with, a peripatetic vampire, that is what you might

¹⁴⁹ The metonymy of woman as death or death as woman derives from the understanding that death, i.e., “the ultimate absence is symbolized as woman” (Crownfield 21), and indicates that the fear of death is aligned with “the radical Otherness of Woman” (Zigarovich 10), since both are perceived as threatening and mysterious. For an insightful study of the history of the notion see Dollimore (2011).

have been if your existence were not governed by ordinary consideration of space and time. (*TGB* 117-8)

Sparrow's words evoke the concept of woman as death and the figure of the *femme fatale*,¹⁵⁰ both pointing to the fatal seductiveness of woman generating man's fear to be weakened from desire and be lost or destroyed. Thence, Sparrow positions the female protagonist among mythical women of fatal sexuality, such as Medusa, Salomé and Lilith – that is, he is unable to disassociate from ancient clichés. Yet, by referring to the heroine as an undead spirit, Sparrow also implies the immateriality of her character and portrays her as a vampire, not only from the aspect of destruction (the female vampire feeding on men's blood), but also suggesting a rarely mentioned attributes of vampires, those of vast knowledge and experience accumulated over centuries, and existential solitude, and thereby he secedes from these to a certain extent after all. Moreover, calling the heroine a *peripatetic* vampire signals the acknowledgment of her travelling identity, a position kept alive not by being a sexual parasite but by the fluidity and mobility of the self. What makes the quotation even more interesting is that it draws attention to space and time as indisputable factors in the construction of identity, as possible limitations on the heroine's identity formation.

The "ordinary considerations of space" governing the heroine's life are most visible in her relationship with London and, more precisely, her dwelling place in it. Although (as I have asserted before) the London house is more of a hotel than a home and therefore not a final destination but merely a resting place along the heroine's journey, and despite the fact that Gupta portrays her female protagonist as a liberal woman and her marriage as based on liberal Western values (with husband and wife being equal partners in the relationship), Alexander as a narrator repeatedly betrays his jealousy and obsession, as well as a wish to exercise patriarchal control over her. Hence, his London house is perhaps the most emphatic stop on her journey: domestic space becomes the material embodiment of patriarchal authority, so subtle that it is almost invisible, yet, on an unconscious level, ever present. And this is where the mirror trope of the novel gains the greatest significance.

Throughout the description of the London house, the image of mirrors keeps returning: the narrators speak of "a houseful of mirrors," mentions the "mirrored hallway" and Alexander's "mirrored retreat on the top floor" (*TGB* 43, 6, 8), which lend themselves to

¹⁵⁰ For feminist readings of the *femme fatale* see for example Angela Carter (1982), as well as Mary Anne Doane, according to whom the fear of *femme fatales* is in fact a fear of women's social and sexual mobility (2).

various interpretations of the interrelatedness of space and identity. Since the traditional eighteenth-century meaning of mirrors was vanity (Cf. Mudrovic 13-34; Tietjens Meyers 112), the predominance of mirrors in Alexander's house may suggest his obsessive vanity both as a patriarch and as a man, i.e., it indicates his desire to dominate the household and the marriage, and to be the one and only man in the heroine's life. This desire can be traced back to the fact that, as Jenijoy La Belle points out, what men see in the mirror is "a transcendental concept of the self" (9), an ideal masculinity sought to be confirmed by the reflection. It is this image of an idealised powerful masculinity that the presence of his wife's real and alleged past lovers and her infidelity with David threaten to shatter and which, as we shall see later, triggers the dramatic events at the end of the novel.

Of course, the picture could not be complete without looking at the 'other side of the mirror': the heroine's image and self-image as portrayed with the help of the mirror trope. Let me return, then, to the longer version of the first quote I analysed here to examine it from the perspective of her identity as reflected in, and embodied by, "the houseful of mirrors":

Some fissure your gaze into a thousand threads, others curve your smile into cruel rainbowed horizons, the odalisque-sized mirror that guards your bath still steamily flatters, but the glazed portals of the broom closet remain relentless in the examination of your features, surgical, under harsh kitchen light ... every one of them, my love, down to the last looking glass, will tell your tale differently, as we will, my love, all of us who have loved you. (*TGB* 10)

Just as the narration offers the heroine a kind of linguistic mirror by reflecting (on) her story from a male perspective, inviting the woman to identify herself with it, the description of the mirrors here, limited to their reflection of the woman's body and physical features, may as well imply women's perception of their body in its reflection created by patriarchal discourses. By suggesting an equation between the mirrors and the men, the quotation thus points to Virginia Woolf's claim that "[w]omen have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of men at twice its natural size" (*A Room* 43). Joining Woolf, Diana Tietjens Meyers' makes the following claim: "Women are captives of mirrors that are manufactured in patriarchal shops. When women aren't being reflected back as narcissists enamored with their own faces, they are drafted into service as reflecting surfaces for male egos" (Preface). Furthermore, men and/as mirrors may present different images of the heroine and thus highlight different parts of her story and traits

of her personality, yet are nevertheless only subjective interpretations, reproductions claiming to be the original. Another interesting aspect of the mirror metaphor here is that the mirrors are claimed to be fissuring the woman's gaze, not her looks or image – yet the gaze does not *per se* form part of the reflection. Therefore, the implication that mirrors/men fissure the woman's gaze/her way of seeing herself, may as well point back not only to the multiplicity of perspectives but also to the men's desire to control and possess the heroine, since, to quote Foucault, the mirror “exerts a sort of counteraction on the position” (“Of Other Spaces” 24) that she occupies.

In comparison, a houseful of mirrors turns out to be just as restricting and uncanny as a mirrorless house, and this revelation is well-illustrated in the female protagonist's avoidance of mirrors throughout the novel. Only once is she depicted looking into a mirror – in the lobby of the hotel Daniel takes her to commit adultery – and even then she watches the reflection of others instead of herself:

For this is not the time to look into your own eyes, lest they seduce you, once again, into the orgy of analysis that had come between you and the agony of death, last winter, as you stood, combing your hair, at the old, wardrobe mirror ... You had realised then that for you, your sister's death had been the passing of an image in the mirror, that for you, the truth of her being was elsewhere” (*TGB* 185).

The female protagonist's reluctance to see herself in mirrors is explained by her unavoidable analysis of the reflection to find the truth and the realisation that it is not to be found there, firstly because with her sister's death a substantial part of her dies, creating an absence, and secondly because she comes to see that the image in the mirror can never fully reflect one's identity. Her questioning of reality evokes Foucault's concept of the mirror as a kind of heterotopia – it exists in reality but the image it reflects exists in “virtual space,” that is, if I want to see myself, my gaze must get through both the “utopia” of the mirror and my virtual image: “I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself where I am absent” (“Of Other Spaces” 24).

The notion of the mirror as a heterotopia is helpful in explaining the heroine's avoidance of mirrors and her claim to find the truth of her sister's and, as it seems likely, also her own identity beyond the mirror image, which may only reflect a partial truth, or no truth at all, concerning identity. Consequently, for her the mirror does not symbolize vanity, nor is it

“a medium for interrogating and defining the self” (Mudrovic 16). What the heroine does when analysing her reflection is perhaps closest to La Belle’s re-interpretation of the Lacanian mirror-phase, according to which a woman may read her own reflection beyond its surface level, and be open to the fluidity of her repeated findings, that is, her mirroring is “not a stage but a continual, ever shifting process of self-realization’ (10). For Tietjens Meyers, constantly repeated mirroring offers women the chance to acknowledge their image and identity as three-dimensional individuals, to create a self-imagery as part of an emancipatory process (Preface). For the female protagonist, however, this process proves to be increasingly difficult in her husband’s house, looking into her husband’s mirrors, so she is in need of other spaces and places, other mirrors to create different self-images and her politics of location.

Since the London house cannot be a room of *her* own, the position that the heroine could speak from may be best understood through James Clifford’s interpretation of Rich’s notion, as “a dynamic awareness of discrepant attachments” (“Notes” 82), a new politics of location which views location as dynamic and multiple:

‘Location,’ here, is not a matter of finding a stable ‘home’ or of discovering a common experience. Rather it is a matter of being aware of the difference that makes a difference in concrete situations, of recognizing the various inscriptions, ‘places’ or ‘histories’ that both empower and inhibit the construction of theoretical categories like ‘Woman,’ ‘Patriarchy,’ or ‘colonization’ ... ‘Location’ is thus, concretely, a *series* of locations and encounters, travel within diverse, but limited spaces. (“Notes” 82)

What makes London the most significant location in the novel and in the heroine’s life is exactly its quality as a series of diverse locations and limited spaces linked by the heroine’s trajectory made in just one day – a time-space compression manifested in a timeless city, a location which is viewed “as a part of travel, as entailing movement or multiplicity rather than stasis and singularity” (Kaplan 167). In one of the few instances when we hear her own words, the female protagonist claims: “London ... is in a class of its own, it is a city I would say I both hate and love, if the large part of our relationship were not indifference” (*TGB* 107). The ambivalence of this relationship may in fact derive directly from the dichotomy of space as movement and as stasis. For the heroine as a cosmopolite, London’s appeal presumably lies in its transnational, transcultural nature which invites her to merge into it and is in constant motion. However, as a resident, she despises it for the fixity that it imposes on her, and which, similarly to her marriage and her house, positions it as a confined and

restricting space, a possessive locality, or, in the narrators' words, "the wide imperious city" (*TGB* 57), which, as the spatial manifestation of the husband's patriarchy, triggers her transgression of its confines.

As part of her attempt to transgress physical borders – predominantly those of the 'home' – the heroine engages in physical movement, thereby defying the state of settlement. The narrators mention several of her outings with Avishek in London, and on the very day the main storyline takes place, she is depicted while criss-crossing the city, following an unplanned and directionless, yet distinct route from her home near the Natural History Museum to Heathrow, then to Foyles and a teashop on Charing Cross Road, Trafalgar Square, St. James's Park, some nearby department store, Daniel's council flat, Vladimir's father's flat near Gloucester Road, the hotel and finally, back home. For the most part, her perambulations are (openly or secretly) shared with the men in her life and, due to the nature of their relationship, become a journey not only from place to place but from one identity position to another. First, she travels as a friend, seeing Sparrow off at Heathrow; then, after accidentally meeting Daniel and his son at the bookshop, she drifts directionlessly as a lover; and finally, having to take her lost niece home, she returns to the house as a worrying aunt, only to slip back into her position as the submissive wife of a jealous Alexander, feeling threatened in his superiority by the presence of her past and present lovers.

Considering these identity positions and the mental movement they imply, the female protagonist's trajectories in the city become a symbolic journey, and the journey turns out to be a chapter in her unique – gendered and late-twentieth century – *Bildungsroman*. Parsons describes the female *Bildungsroman* as characterised by the heroine's journeys to or in the confined space of the city and the city as the "spatial manifestation" of the journey: a "labyrinth" which, "although mappable, is a place of numerous trajectories, along which one can wander" (70) and which thereby enables and generates the construction of her identity. By embarking on such journeys in various urban spaces, the identity of the female protagonist may be interpreted in two distinct, yet, to a certain extent, correlative ways. On one hand, the heroine might be said to become the quintessential female cosmopolite, the path-breaker and representative of what Pnina Werbner terms "the new post-1990s cosmopolitanism" (2). The term defines cosmopolites not as rootless individuals but as individuals possessing "particular and transcendent loyalties – morally, and inevitably also, politically," who possess "the human capacity to imagine the world from an Other's perspective, and to imagine the

possibility of a borderless world of cultural plurality” (2), and who, by doing so, are not to be viewed as individual agents but as a collective – a sisterhood of *cosmopolitan* women, to paraphrase Kaplan.

The second interpretation is based less on loyalty than on transgression and defiance: throughout and due to her journeys the female protagonist comes to be characterised by a “heartening anarchy that you came to recognise as life” (*TGB* 103). It is as a child, in a taboo-free conversation with her father, that she first gets “cast into the heady and precarious state of rulelessness, the first fluted chasms of the glassblower’s breath” (*TGB* 102), that is, she learns to defy established norms and social expectations, and experiences the power of agency. Years later, as a traveller and a married woman, she strives to transgress the borders set up by confining places and patriarchy and, due to a chance meeting, in a sudden, all-consuming desire for Daniel, the new rule is born:

Last night the moon, the moon buried hard against cork and glass, ... blistering softly against the bubbled mirrors ... last night the moon came dropping its clothes in the street, I took it as a sign to start singing, falling *up* into the bowl of sky. The bowl breaks. Everywhere is falling everywhere. Nothing else to do. But here’s the new rule, my love: Break the wineglass, let the shards swallow your palm, fall, fall, gently now, down the everted chute of time, towards the glassblower’s breath ... How could it be denied, when his lips met yours, a new rule was born. (*TGB* 155-6)

Recalling (and slightly re-writing) Rumi’s words, Gupta describes the heroine’s agency as an act of defiance: although she believes that her marriage is liberal enough for Alexander to understand and accept her affair, committing adultery with a stranger (the woman and Daniel have only met a few hours earlier on the street) is considered to be a crime by both Western and Eastern standards. Falling “up,” “towards the glassblower’s breath,” i.e., breaking the laws of physics is then the ultimate transgression, going against the laws of society and patriarchy, against every established and unspoken rule, to create a new one: “the rule of disorder, the disenfranchisement of chaos” (*TGB* 201), which disrupts dominant discourses on both order and identity.

Fate and the female nomad

The heroine's trajectories and spatial detachment discussed so far position her as a cosmopolite, a travelling identity; her defiance and transgression, however, point farther than that – to a “desire to suspend all attachment to established discourses” (Braidotti, *Nomadic* 18) and thereby to an identification based on Rosi Braidotti's concept of the female nomad. Drawing on anthropological concepts of the nomad and reinterpreting Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of nomadism, Braidotti created the notion of the female nomad as “an epistemological and political entity to be defined and affirmed by women in the confrontation of their multiple differences of class, race, age, lifestyle, sexual preference” (*Nomadic* 4). Being a young middle-class cosmopolitan woman of the Indian diaspora engaged in constant physical and mental movement, the female protagonist's identity can be seen as a compound of several different modes of differentiation; it is fluid, transgressive and multiple and represents “an existential condition that ... translates into a style of thinking” (Braidotti, *Nomadic* 1): a female nomadic consciousness. As elaborated in *Nomadic Subjects*, the nomad is not homeless, but finds home in movement; the nomad's identity may be seen as resisting and transgressing the dominant views on subjectivity, and is characterised by “transitory attachment” (25) and “the act of going, regardless of the destination” (23), which does not necessarily involve physical movement but is emphatically embodied in mental mobility; in Braidotti's words, “[n]ot all nomads are world travellers; some of the greatest trips can take place without physically moving from one's habitat. It is the subversion of set of conventions that defines the nomadic state, not the literal act of travelling” (*Nomadic* 5). From a spatial perspective, cosmopolitanism, combining movement and temporary settlement in urban space as a way of living, can actually be an attribute of the female nomad, especially when the cosmopolite is also a polyglot.¹⁵¹ Although Braidotti never actually uses the term cosmopolitan in her study, her admitted self-identification as a polyglot, and her short account of the various transnational urban spaces she has lived in, suggest a correlation of cosmopolitanism and female nomadism. One could risk the claim that female nomads are all cosmopolites, but not all cosmopolites are female nomads since they possess a certain agency and political stance that cosmopolites do not necessarily have. Although the cosmopolitan identity in question is postmodern, Parsons's study of modernist cosmopolitanism may actually be relevant here: “There is something detached and overseeing about the

¹⁵¹ For Braidotti, the polyglot is “a variation on the theme of critical nomadic consciousness” (*Nomadic* 13) whose transgression is not spatial or political but linguistic.

cosmopolitan modernist identity that works against social participation and agency” (14). Despite the distinctive differences, my reading of Gupta’s heroine considers both cosmopolitanism and nomadism as intertwining constituents of her identity.

Gupta’s heroine as a cosmopolite can lay claim to many homes but is attached to none. She is portrayed journeying among places and spaces, but her only destination is fulfilment and freedom. As a nomad, she trespasses the boundaries and rules set up by society and patriarchy; she relinquishes “all idea, desire, or nostalgia for fixity” and embraces “the desire for an identity made of transitions, successive shifts, and coordinated changes, without and against an essential unity” (Braidotti, *Nomadic* 22) – a fluid and multiple identity both made up of, and opposed to, her “myriad reflections.” As an educated intellectual, she is a representative of the “woman of ideas” (Braidotti, *Nomadic* 22) and although she does not engage in politics, in a way her character may be read as embodying “political resistance to hegemonic and exclusionary views of subjectivity” (Braidotti, *Nomadic* 23), since her actions and stance display a strong critical consciousness which “resists settling into socially coded modes of thought and behaviour” (Braidotti, *Nomadic* 5). In my view, it is her nomadism as a way of life and state of mind which may provide her with a politics of location, both in Rich’s and Clifford’s interpretation.

If the novel ended at this point, the heroine’s journey and *Bildung* would have a triumphant ending from the aspect of female agency and a promising start from the point of view of a fluid identity. However, Gupta’s repeated warnings of the power of fate and the inescapability of death eventually manifest themselves in a *grand finale* set in the London house, a dramatic ending questioning the sustainability of the female protagonist’s agency and the success of her female nomadism. In the narrators’ words, “the circles of fate” (*TGB* 85) settled within the heroine years before that decisive day in London, and, since her sister’s slow death, have grown into a conscious indifference to protect her self and become the major driving force behind many of her actions, including her brief affair with Daniel: “You have never lost your taste for fantasy ... the desire for destiny still runs strong in you, and you cannot help feel ... that the only purpose of Daniel’s insular being is to have illuminated your sense for a few hours” (*TGB* 93). The heroine’s adultery, then, may be interpreted in widely different, even contrasting ways: as a conscious transgressive act meant to emphasise her female agency or as an unconscious deed generated by her indifference to the opinion of her husband (and society); as a provoked sensual experience, part of an attempt to assert life as

opposed to death or as a submission to her basic instincts (and the images the narrators have of her), to lust and fate, and eventually, to death.

At one point in the novel, Vladimir's father points out the problem of fate for the young characters: "[Y]ou think you are defying something, fate maybe, by making no decisions about life, and all you do is play into the hands of fate. Take it from me, life is about defying fate, not just ignoring it" (*TGB* 189). Whether committing adultery after conscious deliberation or in submission to an uncontrollable urge, whether defying or ignoring fate by doing so, the heroine's attraction to the butcher, permeated with images of death right from the start, certainly proves fatal. Daniel, with his hollow cheeks and "corpse-green brow" (*TGB* 193), with a smile holding "the enigma of all existence" (*TGB* 65) and lips tasting of death, appears as the metonymy of death and fate:

I hope you would come with me, he says quietly ... and where the white calmness had begun to grow within you, a blind surge of blood blots out all memory, his smile splinters a wall of mirrors in the back of your skull, his smile, carving deep into your being, you are an old hunger, you dream, you are an old, forgotten hunger, you are my first dream of death. (*TGB* 147)

The above words and the sexual intercourse that this scene leads to evoke the centuries-old equation of sex as death (Cf. Zigarovich 1-28) and point back to the figure of the *femme fatale*, although in an unorthodox fashion the fatal, lethal female is exchanged here with a male figure, i.e., death becomes masculinised. This may also be underlined by viewing the two character's intercourse and orgasm as denoting a metaphorical death, a *petite mort* [little death], since, in Georges Bataille's words, "between death and the reeling, heady motion of the little death the distance is hardly noticeable" (239). Furthermore, Daniel's ability to "splinter" mirrors may be understood as signifying the "loss of the self" (Zigarovich 11) for the female protagonist. On the other hand, if the self has to rely on mirrors to identify itself, the splintering of mirrors may also signal the moment of truth, an instance of Lacanian *jouissance*,¹⁵² when the subject breaks out of the symbolic order, yet, as it is the symbolic order which provides its existence, by breaking out it ceases to exist, dissolves to give way to the Real (Cf. Lacan, *Écrits* 199-207). According to Fred Botting and Scott Wilson, Lacan

¹⁵² Lacan's *jouissance* is a concept analysed and continuously changing through the course of his seminars from the 1950s to the 1970s. For comprehensive studies and overviews see, for instance, Fink (1995), Nasio (1998) and Freeland (2013).

theorised the *jouissance* of woman as “an experience, essentially, of unknowing” (34). Gupta’s heroine, on the other hand, is well aware of her *jouissance*, which in this case may not simply be a desire to be desired by the Other but libidinal *jouissance*, which Elizabeth Grosz defines as a “corporeal, non-genital pleasure” (*Sexual* xiv),¹⁵³ as well as an excitement in correlation with pleasure and pain (Cf. Fink 59-60), another aspect of the “new rule,” inasmuch as it transgresses the Freudian the law of homeostasis (the psyche searching for as little tension as possible) and is thereby “beyond the pleasure principle” (Sheridan x).¹⁵⁴ The heroine’s *jouissance* is, then, anything but “unknowing;” with its strong correlation with death, as the quotation implies, it has probably been an encounter long expected.

By his irresistible allure and his ability to overrule the heroine’s old ‘mirror-images,’ Daniel becomes the embodiment of fate itself, foreshadowed and experienced, feared and yearned; fate that can be neither ignored, nor defied, but only embraced. By linking their sexual intercourse with death, Gupta subverts both gender roles and the trope of death as a woman; yet, through the imagery used in Daniel’s characterisation she also foreshadows *his* death, and thus re-invites the interpretation of the heroine’s character as a *femme fatale*, inasmuch as she presents female lust as “loss and transcendence, relegating the male lover to a position of passivity and lack of articulation” (Fludernik 83). Daniel’s passive submission to the heroine’s desire and her submission to the fate he embodies thus have a double effect: in the narrators’ words, “the fullness of his lust ... splits [her] life in half” (*TGB* 161) and, in reverse, she “would have him smell of death” (*TGB* 186).

At the end of the novel, Sparrow, Avishek and Daniel all end up in the London house, only to be brutally killed by Alexander. The husband’s obsessive desire, jealousy and urge to show off his patriarchal superiority thus result in the elimination of his alleged rivals, and, by extension, of their tales and mirror-images of the female protagonist, by which Alexander hopes to confine her to a single fixed identity as a submissive wife. The most puzzling aspect of the massacre is that the heroine, in a state of a silent shock, actually helps her husband dispose of the bodies, i.e., she does not turn against him or assert her agency in any way but retreats to the submissive role he assigns her to. Despite having claimed that she “had wanted to defeat and to possess” death (*TGB* 195), she eventually becomes defeated and possessed by

¹⁵³ For further feminist interpretations of *jouissance* see Kristeva, *Desire in Language* 164-5, and Irigaray’s *Amante marine* 48-9.

¹⁵⁴ Sheridan’s words here are a direct reference to Freud’s “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” (1920) according to which the human psyche looks or opts for the lowest level of tension possible.

both death and fate – first she is paralysed, then, as the narrator-husband’s final words indicate, she succumbs, even though “the secret of [the men’s] death will fester within you, forever” (*TGB* 265-66).

Although the female protagonist’s cosmopolitan and nomadic female identity is in sharp contrast with the double subaltern positions of the Pakistani Muslim women in *Maps*, eventually she finds herself to be similarly subordinate to a man. While she appears as a strong, independent woman defying restrictions and subverting conventions, her actions and fate are nevertheless controlled by her love and lust for different men, for whom she is an object of desire – an object to get hold of, to possess, to guard and never to let go of. Such a possessive attitude and obsession, i.e., a certain “patriarchal desire” (Zigarovich 12) is portrayed in her college lovers, David and Vladimir, and, more emphatically, in the figure of Avishek and Alexander. Despite being married for years and having had only a platonic relationship with the heroine, the cousin is unable to lose hold of their childhood love, and secretly follows her throughout her wanderings in London, jealous of her affair with Daniel developing in front of his very eyes. Likewise, the husband, an intelligent, wealthy, cosmopolitan man with Persian roots, oozing confidence and Western liberalism, becomes weak and insecure in his infatuated love for her: “I was almost afraid, he told you, that you were a figment of my untrustworthy imagination, and what is to say that you have not remained a runaway dream, you have wondered trapping discoloured moth wing under glass, what will tell you that you have not been, all these years a delectable mirage, an abandoned myth” (*TGB* 45). Interestingly, the moth trope of Aslam’s novel returns here in a highly gendered and suggestive form: the female protagonist’s “love for Lepidoptera” (*TGB* 46) becomes the metaphor of her irresistible femininity, with her being the fire and the men the moths who get burned and die in this fatal attraction. Furthermore, the heroine would prefer to be “a runaway dream” lest she should be trapped by the men’s desire and possessive love, which strive to keep her “under glass” and, in the final dramatic scene, force her into a subaltern position.

Despite the abrupt ending of her nomadic trajectories, I still read the heroine’s figure as a female nomad. Although patriarchal desire eventually defeats and overrules “transgressive desire” (Zigarovich 18),¹⁵⁵ i.e., her adultery is punished by, and results in, her eventual subordination to patriarchal oppression, Gupta’s call for female agency and a

¹⁵⁵ According to James Penney, “desire is by definition a desire for transgression” (179).

nomadic consciousness is unmissable. Falling “towards the glassblower’s breath” remains the defiant, transgressive act of nomadism, and offers the possibility of seeing space as “a limitless lightness” (*TGB* 259), of inhabiting the world as, to quote Nasta, “a new home without rules,” which may be “a surrogate for a permanent physical and emotional home” (“Homes” 98); as she notes, the glassblower’s breath “is ultimately also a way of breathing new life into the world, of transforming the way we see the world” (“Homes” 99). In an interview, Gupta made the following claim about diasporic subjectivity and nomadism:

I think one has to be comfortable with the notion that one has one’s own cultural identity and that one doesn’t necessarily have to be at ‘home,’ so to speak. But having had that cultural identity, or whatever else it is that is established for you, wherever you are rooted, whatever you are rooted in ... I think we have to accept that we are going to be perpetually wandering. (qtd. in B. Williams)

It is tempting to read *The Glassblower’s Breath* in the light of Gupta’s comments. The transnational spaces of the novel and nomadic trajectories they provide invite the female protagonist and the reader alike to be “somewhat outside of being anywhere,” to lose our concrete sense of ‘home’ and ‘abroad’ and, embrace a more fluid, mobile identity. Transnational spaces thereby may become the politics of location where, as bell hooks claims, “we begin the process of re-vision’ (145), i.e., re-visioning our notions of identity and home, and where women may defy fate with female agency.

Brick Lane

The trope of fate provides an important connection between *The Glassblower’s Breath* and *Brick Lane* – the heroines of both novels are characterised by an indifference to fate, as well as an ambivalent desire to succumb to it and defy it. The centrality of the fate-trope in Ali’s novel is called attention to by the Turgenev- and Heraclitus-mottos prefacing the text and followed by the (repeatedly re-merging) story of “How You Were Left To Your Fate” (*BL* 15): despite the complications arising at her birth, the female protagonist was not taken to hospital but left to the hands of fate to decide whether she would live or die. This significant event leads to Nazneen’s internalisation of the advice “to treat life with the same indifference with which it would treat her ... What could not be changed must be borne. And since nothing could be changed, everything had to be borne” (*BL* 15-16). The autarchy and authority of fate

thence becomes a principle ruling Nazneen's life, a "mantra, fettle and challenge" (*BL* 15-16), and as such, a markedly gendered one – her mother suggests that total submission to fate is also the basic rule of womanhood, and so a 'natural' suffering becomes a state that the young Nazneen "longed to be enriched by" (*BL* 103). Therefore, when at the age of eighteen, the female protagonist arrives in England from a small Bangladeshi village for an arranged marriage with the immigrant Chanu, twenty years her senior, her behavior is "policed by the pedagogic narration of her origin" (Cormack 701): she believes that through her marriage and migration she submits to her fate and thus the traditions and expectations of her culture. The Bengali community she is surrounded by in London lives by its traditional rules, both secluded from the outside world and rejected by it, drugs and racism being the only links between East and West. Amidst the temptations and hardships, the community strives to conserve its Bengali identity and expects its members to remain loyal and true to their culture and religion. For Nazneen, who does not speak English and has to deal with the unfamiliarity and insecurity of British culture, the community is supposed to provide security; its rules offer the foundations to support her in accepting her new life and to justify its predestined nature.

Nazneen's displacement, that is, her transition from the Asian village to metropolitan London, however, involves the dislocation of the source of her fatalism as well, which, in the words of Alastair Cormack, "becomes less able to maintain its organicism and project a coherent identity for her" (701). Nazneen's subsequent identity crisis and process of identity formation go parallel with her changing attitude to fate, which is foreshadowed in a flash-forward scene, a brief synopsis of what is to follow:

So that when, at the age of thirty-four, after she had been given three children and had one taken away, when she had a futile husband and had been fated a young and demanding lover, when for the first time she could not wait for the future to be revealed but had to make it for herself, she was as startled by her own agency as an infant who waves a clenched fist and strikes itself upon the eye. (*BL* 16)

In Cormack's view, the above quotation highlights the fact that her "status and circumstances force Nazneen to construct her identity through the dialogue between the narration of her origin and the reality of the history through which she lives" (702), i.e., in a liminal, third space. Another intriguing aspect of this passage is how, similarly to Gupta's novel, Ali draws a parallel between sexuality and fate, identity formation and agency, and how it positions the fate-agency dichotomy at the centre of its portrayal of female diasporic subjectivity, the main

theme of *Brick Lane*. Perhaps the most thought-provoking sentence here is “for the first time she could not wait for the future to be revealed but had to make it for herself,” which reveals the omniscience of the narrator, who not only describes future events but provides snippets of explanations; while the passive structure used up till this point is exchanged for an active one, both foreshadowing Nazneen’s active role in the turn of fate and emphasising the birth of her female agency as a result of fate.

The novel follows Nazneen’s life from the first confused and obedient years in a confined diaspora and domestic space to her final decision to start a new, independent life, not as a dutiful Bengali wife but as a strong British Asian woman in a more enabling, open multicultural space. The portrayal of Nazneen’s emancipation and identity formation is accompanied by the emotional and culture shock of migration, the everyday reality of racism, the hardships of settling in, and adapting to, an utterly unfamiliar country, the feeling of dislocation and identity confusion, and the frequent contrast which is drawn between Britain and Bangladesh through Nazneen’s memories and her sister Hasina’s letters from Bangladesh. As opposed to the cosmopolitan travelling identity of the female protagonist of *The Glassblower’s Breath*, embodied in perpetual motion, Ali’s heroine is predominantly portrayed within one set location. Settling in “Bangla Town” (BL 417), the insulated Bangladeshi neighbourhood of Tower Hamlets in East London, after her transnational movement, Nazneen’s figure displays classic features of the representation of diasporic consciousness and experiences, and her story re-directs our attention to how significantly diaspora differs from travel (Cf. Clifford, *Routes* 251). On the other hand, although the novel highlights several notions associated with diaspora fiction as discussed in chapter 1, its strong gender perspective (with Nazneen as the focalizer of the narration) offers an alternative vision of diasporic identity formation, and calls for the reformation of national and cultural identity by proposing the existence of a new kind of gendered British subjectivity. Drawing on these dual aspects, I shall examine Ali’s novel on two separate but intertwining layers: as a diaspora novel, thereby revisiting, expanding and summarising specific features discussed in chapter 1, and as a female *Bildungsroman*, “re-imagining the migrant narrative from a female perspective” (Upstone, *British Asian* 168).

As opposed to the highly poetic and mythic style of Gupta's novel, with its linear plotline and third-person narration *Brick Lane* is a traditional Western realist narrative,¹⁵⁶ yet it is first and foremost labelled as a diaspora novel, hailed by several reviewers and critics for providing a much-needed insight into the life of a secluded Bangladeshi community,¹⁵⁷ and dismissed by others questioning its authenticity and representativeness. The novel's genre and place in British literature is equally debated, ranging from its appraisal as a "Multicultural Bildungsroman" (Perfect) to disappointed claims that it embodies "the cheat of the successful commercial 'multicultural novel'" (Chakrabarti 7).¹⁵⁸ Despite the controversial critical reception of the novel and the outrage within the Bangladeshi of Tower Hamlets,¹⁵⁹ the social, racial and drug-related problems of the neighbourhood and the community depicted by Ali with a Dickensian realism serve as a necessary background for the key themes of the novel and complete my analysis of the formation of diaspora space and identity conducted in chapter 1.

Confined versus open space

Perhaps the first and most visible sign of Ali's novel as an example of diaspora fiction is that, in contrast with many *Bildungsromans* with a titular reference to the hero/heroine, its title refers to a concrete geographical place, to one of the most well-known streets in Tower Hamlets and the heart of the community, which is, as Sukhdev Sandu remarks, still very much of "a holding area, a temporary interzone for immigrants who have not yet fully settled in England." In the first part of the novel, set in 1985, Ali portrays the liminality and bleak reality of the immigrant neighbourhood as seen through Nazneen's eyes – the "broken paving

¹⁵⁶ Cormack calls *Brick Lane* "a realist narrative with a postcolonial story" (695), while Nick Bentley claims that it "adopts the conventions of a traditional Western form because [Ali's] novel is intended, primarily, for a white, middle-class readership" (*Contemporary* 86).

¹⁵⁷ Although some critics (e.g. Chakrabarti and Sandhu), claimed that the novel was the first to expose the hidden world of Bangladeshi immigrant women in London, *Brick Lane* is definitely not the first diaspora novel to focus on the area and its Bangladeshi community. Farrukh Dhondy's *East End at Your Feet* (1976) and *Come to Mecca* (1978) both feature *Brick Lane* and a number of Bangladeshi characters, while Syed Manzurul Islam's *The Mapmakers of Spitalfields* (1997) was the first collection of short stories about British Bangladeshis.

¹⁵⁸ Perhaps one of the most interesting interpretations and pieces of criticism is that of Silvia Albertazzi, who, in comparing *Brick Lane* and Smith's *White Teeth* to Dhaliwal's *Tourism*, claims that these novels are representatives of a so-called "migrant ethno-mélo" (165): "As there is a tourist approach to life, there is also a tourist approach to literature: it is the attitude of those second-generation writers who, having grown up in middle class England, look at immigrant reality from a distance, exploiting it for the pleasure and the curiosity of their (white) readers. In this sense, the fortunate novels of Monica Ali and Zadie Smith can be labelled 'tourist fiction' ... the politically correct spectacularization of migrant life" (174-75).

¹⁵⁹ See for example Amit Roy's (2003) article in the *Daily Telegraph* reporting how the community proclaimed the novel as an insult.

stones” and the grey blocks of flats with their net curtains behind which life “was all shapes and shadows,” a red and gold sari hanging from one of the metal-framed windows and the street sign on the brickwork written in “in stiff English capitals” and Bengali “curlicues” (*BL* 17-18). Similarly to Aslam’s portrayal of (absolute) diaspora space, Tower Hamlets is depicted as an immigrant ghetto of a closely-knit community, and it is also an in-between space, where the diasporic subject has to face the difficulties of living in the heart of the multicultural metropolis while trying to preserve their roots and culture. It is a place where you can barely hear an English word, the shops sell traditional Bengali goods, women cannot walk the streets alone, and kinship provides a sense of belonging: “[M]ost of our people here are Sylhetis,” Chanu explains, “They all stick together because they ... know each other from the villages, and they come to Tower Hamlets and they think they are back in the village. Most of them have jumped ship ... And when they jump ship and scuttle over here, then in a sense they are home again” (*BL* 28).

Although, as Avtar Brah asserts, home, is a mythic place of no return (192), these immigrants suffer from a “Going Home Syndrome,” which one of the characters, Dr Azad, defines in the following way: “These people are basically peasants and they miss the land. The pull of the land is stronger than the pull of blood ... They don’t ever really leave home. Their bodies are here but their hearts are back there. And anyway, look how they live: just recreating the villages here” (*BL* 32). The immigrants’ “special Tower Hamlets disease” (*BL* 456) underlines the unavoidable pull of what Mohammad Anwar (1998) calls the “myth of return,” which allows immigrants to perceive themselves as sojourners whose stay in the host country is temporary and which is “a crucial means of denying that migration implied fundamental changes” (Gardner and Shukur 158). The community’s denial of immigrant identity and the changes it entails points to what Rushdie calls the “[q]uestion of mutability of the essence of the self,” (*Satanic* 276), by which he refers to Lucretius’s and Ovid’s respective theories: according to the former, a change in one’s identity means that one “breaks out of its limitations ... disregards its own rules,” but “by doing so [it] brings immediate death to its old self,” while the latter views change as a metamorphosis in which the self, i.e. “[o]ur immortal essences...[a]re still the same forever, but adopt in their migrations ever-varying forms” (*Satanic* 276). The Bangladeshi community of Brick Lane apparently does not believe in the possibility of metamorphosis with the essence of the self remaining intact, but shares Lucretius’s point of view and perceives any changes that migration would imply as death – the loss of both one’s ‘true’ identity and one’s homeland.

Furthermore, the symptoms and causes of the “Going Home Syndrome” highlight the importance of territoriality and reterritorialization, and point both to Brah’s concept of homing desire and Mishra’s diasporic imaginary. These notions are manifested in the portrayal of the spatial features of the immigrant neighbourhood of *Brick Lane*, an “ethnic enclave” (Mishra, “Diasporic” 423), the substitute for the imaginary homeland, which is hoped to provide its inhabitants with a sense of community and belonging, and which may eventually become a so-called *desh pardesh*. The titular phrase of Roger Ballard’s (1994) study of South Asian presence in Britain denotes a “home from home” and “at home abroad” (5) and designates the construction of a diaspora community and space on the terms of its members and based on the kinship connections of an “artificial *bridari*’ (wider family)” (Y. Hussain 102).¹⁶⁰

Having convinced herself that “fate cannot be changed, no matter how you struggle against it” (*BL* 22), that is, she is fated to live this life and follow its rules, Nazneen spends most of her time within the confines of domestic space, having little interaction with members of the community; she restricts her life to her duties as a wife, executing Chanu’s every demand, listening to his endless rants on various subjects he believes to be an expert on, but never speaking her mind or contradicting him. However, Nazneen is aware of the sadness and hopelessness of her situation and is also ashamed by being so: “[I]f I were a wishing type, I know what I would wish ... Was it cheating? To think, I know what I would wish?” (*BL* 18) Unable to take on agency and cope with her immigrant experience, she seeks shelter in the teachings of the Qur’an and in nostalgia for her native village that she stays attached to through Hasina’s letters. Similarly to the South Asian inhabitants of Dasht-e-Tanhaii in *Maps*, Nazneen has no chance of acquiring a sense of belonging to the diaspora community or of feeling at home in diaspora space, both because Tower Hamlets is merely an imperfect imitation of Bangladesh, and because Nazneen is ‘imprisoned’ by her strong attachment to the lost homeland and *in* domestic space. Although initially she is impressed by the comfort and overly-furnished quality of the flat, she gradually feels more and more suffocated by the ever expanding furniture and becomes claustrophobic among the four walls, experiencing it as what Tuan calls “oppressive containment” and a constant source of her feeling of isolation,

¹⁶⁰ In Yasmin Hussain’s explanation, *bridari* is “a wider kinship group which encourage loyalty from individuals and also expectations of their roles. Within Brick Lane and its surrounding areas, the individuals within the novel operate within this ‘bridari system’ through their social contacts and relationships within the community, through visits to each other, and by offering services of assistance” (102). For sociological studies of the notion see Muhammad Anwar (1998), Ballard (1994) and Shaw (1994); for literary representation of the *bridari* system, see Meena’s extended family dealt with in chapter 1, as well as the *barathierie* of the Kinnin Park Boys in *Psychoraag*.

“not as contained spaces where warm fellowship or meditation in solitude is possible” (Tuan, *Space and Place* 54) – not as home.

Nazneen’s containment is manifested on three different levels and may be interpreted accordingly: on a cultural level, she is ‘locked up’ in her own femininity and alienness as a Muslim woman in England; in terms of her belief in fate, she is imprisoned by her own story and fatalism; and finally, from a phenomenological point of view, hers is a spatial confinement in a multiply alien space – England, Tower Hamlets and its most direct representation, the flat. As an attempt to fight her claustrophobia, Nazneen spends most of her time gazing through the window at the “hazy sky, squeezed between slabs of concrete” and the dirty, dull red of the brickwork (*BL* 86), which make her feel that she is “trapped inside this body, inside this flat, inside this concrete slab of entombed humanity” (*BL* 76), and which are in sharp contrast with the smells, sounds and images of her native village that keep invading her thoughts: “You can spread your soul over a paddy field, you can whisper to a mango tree, you can feel the earth beneath your toes and know that this is the place, the place where it begins and ends. But what can you tell to a pile of bricks? The bricks will not be moved” (*BL* 86-87). This quotation highlights the most fundamental differences between a phenomenological sense of space as open, dynamic and experienced through bodily senses, and a geometrical conception of space as “passive, fixed, undialectical” (Keith and Pile 5). While a sense of space entails the importance of the body as a medium between the “non-physical, inner, private space of the mind” and “the physical, outer space of the world” (Madanipour 7), viewing space as unmoving and “unmoved” invites passivity, stasis and detachment in Nazneen’s case.

Nazneen’s blurred vision through the curtain/window is on one hand filtered through, and permeated by, South Asian imagery, which signals her rootedness. On the other hand, it is indicative of her one-dimensional, restricted vision of the estate and, by extension, of London, perceiving it as a static, artificial space as opposed to the fluid, natural space of rural Bangladesh. Nazneen’s perspective and spatial experience might be interpreted in the light of Bachelard’s views on urban space and city dwelling: “[A] house in a big city lacks cosmicity. For here, where houses are no longer set in natural surroundings, the relationship between house and space becomes an artificial one. Everything about it is mechanical and, on every side, intimate living flees” (27). What London, Tower Hamlets and the flat in it then lack the most is not only the sense of being one with the universe, but also of intimacy, the cornerstone of the sense of belonging, and by this very lack they generate the feeling of

placelessness, causing Nazneen to “suffer great ontological angst” (Stanley 187). Similarly to Bachelard’s cosmic understanding of the home, Heidegger’s (1971) and Eliade’s (1959) respective concepts of sacred and profane spaces, may also underline this interpretation. Home – in Nazneen’s case, Gouripur – is a sacred place, which “holds back the chaotic profane space” (Stanley 187); it is a place that makes her feel free and alive and evokes a sense of *being*, which Eliade explains as follows: “It is only in [sacred space] that [s]he participates in being, that [s]he has a *real* existence” (64) [original emphasis]. Given the fact that Nazneen is deeply religious, she is very likely to perceive her home as a sacred space and London as a profane space; yet, this does not necessarily explain the perception of the former as open space and the latter as a confined one. The key to this understanding, in my view, may in fact lie in the phenomenological understanding of space as lived and experienced, which require both bodily sensation and movement, as well as the moving body which, according to Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945), necessarily changes in the process of movement. Nazneen, however, stays put and remains unchanged (at least for a while, until she starts moving), i.e. in this respect it is her own stasis which creates the confined space around her – just like the bricks of Tower Hamlets she cannot move or be moved.

The juxtaposition of confined and open space dominates Nazneen’s sense of place and space in the initial years of her immigration in the form of recurring dreams of the “jade-green rice fields” (*BL* 21) stretching ahead of her and touching the sky, and of implied comparisons between the respective skylines: “Slices of grey sky wedged themselves between the blocks of flats. How small they were. In Gouripur, when she looked up she saw that the sky reached to the very ends of the earth. Here she could measure it simply by spreading her fingers” (*BL* 423). The comparison establishes Nazneen’s birthplace as an open space, which, in Tuan’s words, “opens up from the point where one stands, to the broad horizon that separates earth from sky,” and evokes “an image of hopeful time” (*Space and Place* 123). Nazneen’s visions of open space, based on her memories of the hopeful time that was her carefree childhood in this idyllic space, function, in Ágnes Györke’s words, “as nostalgic images that help Nazneen endure the pressure of her entrapment in the city” (43); that is, through her memories and visions of the lost homeland, the heroine is offered a chance to come to terms with the confined spaces she finds herself in the host country. For Nazneen open space is limitless and one with nature, warm and secure; it is an idyllic rural environment, which, to a certain extent, recalls the nostalgic discourse and pastoralism of the English countryside and the traditional Western symbolics of space as freedom – an openness which, in Tuan’s view, “suggests the

future” (*Space and Place* 54). However, since Nazneen’s dreams of Gouripur indicate her taking refuge in the past and hinder her ability to live in the present time and in her present location, the open space of her homeland gradually becomes the confining space of the imaginary homeland, which also triggers profound changes in her perception of urban space.

At one point in the novel, upset by a letter from her sister, whose life back in Bangladesh has taken a tragic turn, Nazneen leaves the flat and sets out on an aimless walk in an unconscious attempt to get lost in the city:

Nazneen walked. She walked to the end of Brick Lane and turned right ... she realized she was leaving herself a trail. Then she turned off at random, began to run ... and thought she had come in a circle. The buildings seemed familiar. She sensed rather than saw, because she had taken care not to notice. But now she slowed down and looked around her. She looked up at a building as she passed. It was constructed almost entirely of glass, with a few thin rivets of steel holding it together ... The building was without end. Above, somewhere, it crushed the clouds. (*BL* 55-56).

Nazneen’s directionless walking may be interpreted as “a spatial acting-out” of her despair (de Certeau 98) and also points to Michel de Certeau’s assertion that “[t]o walk is to lack a place” (103). In de Certeau’s view walking is “the indefinite process of being absent and in search of a proper” which “makes the city itself an immense social experience of lacking a place – an experience that is, to be sure, broken up into countless tiny deportations (displacements and walks)” (103). What Nazneen attempts to do here is not simply to get lost, but perhaps also to find a way back home, only to realise that she is “haunted by a nowhere or by dreamed-of places” (de Certeau 103), by a memory of Gouripur, where there are no high-rise buildings to crush the sky but where “the sky reached to the very ends of the earth” (*BL* 423).

The quotation proves to be significant from the point of view of female agency and Nazneen’s sense of place as well. In contrast with the few brief accounts of Nazneen going shopping with Chanu in Brick Lane, this is the first time she leaves her domestic space on her own and crosses the invisible borders of the neighbourhood to enter ‘proper’ metropolitan space. Thus, although probably unintentionally, she opens up to experiencing space beyond her comfort zone, gazing directly at the city and employing her bodily senses in her perception – in fact, she has no other choice, since she lacks the equipment with which she would be able to read this space in terms of its cultural markers – thus, she is reduced to the

phenomenological minimum of experiencing space in terms of physical properties. Finally, due to this experience, she gains a different sense of urban space, which, despite its dizzying crowdedness, speed and height does not induce her to contrast it with her village this time, but, with the endlessness and broad horizons of the buildings, surprisingly calls forth the sense of an open space.

Lost in the city, Nazneen indeed experiences a sense of endlessness and boundlessness, and is forced to rethink her attitude both to urban space and her own position in it:

Nazneen, hobbling and halting, began to be aware of herself. Without a coat, without a suit, without a white face, without a destination. A leafshake of fear – or was it excitement? – passed through her legs. But they were not aware of her. In the next instant she knew it. They could not see her any more than she could see God. They knew that she existed (just as she knew that He existed) but unless she did something, waved a gun, halted the traffic, they would not see her. She enjoyed this thought. She began to scrutinize. She stared at the long, thin faces, the pointy chins. The women had strange hair ... They pressed their lips together and narrowed their eyes ... A woman in a long red coat stopped and took a notebook from her bag ... Her clothes were rich. They were armour, and her ringed fingers weapons. No longer visible, Nazneen walked faster and looked only at what she had to see to walk without falling or colliding ... She, like Hasina, could not simply go home. They were both lost in cities that would not pause even to shrug. (*BL* 56-59)

Carefully studying the white British perhaps for the first time, Nazneen perceives them as frightening others and herself – the alleged other among the natives – as invisible. The significance of the passage lies exactly in this duality of the notion of otherness, generated by the differences in angles and by Nazneen's sudden realisation of both her visible otherness and the 'invisibility' of it. Being "[w]ithout a coat, without a suit, without a white face, without a destination" may thus be interpreted in two ways: the lack of these things implies difference, otherness, and, since these attributes are not there, that is, not visible, they also make their 'bearer' invisible. Furthermore, Nazneen's invisibility during her walk evokes the notion of the *flâneur* and the gendered concept of the *flâneuse*.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the *flâneur*, the leisurely stroller of the crowd observing people but remaining unobserved may be perceived as an anonymous, invisible figure, while the *flâneuse*, as a possible female equivalent is invisible because she is an impossibility – as Janet Wolff (1990) claims, in the nineteenth-century respectable women did not, could not walk the streets alone. As a Muslim woman, Nazneen may find herself in the same position, discouraged from leaving the flat without her husband lest she should be object of the male gaze; yet, when she is desperately running the streets of the city alone, observing the white British passing her by, her invisibility points to the early twentieth-century figure of the *flâneuse* as a female observer, who, according to Deborah Parson, was “entering the city with fresh eyes, observing it from within” (6) and for whom “the city operates not just as a setting or image, but as a constituent of identity” (7). In Loretta Lees’s view *flânerie* as an act of walking, a form of movement “parallels with the idea of the search, and in the abstract wandering in the city this search would seem to be not for a place but for self and identity” (13) and can contribute to one’s understanding of “the openness and potential transitivity of the city” (13).¹⁶¹ However, at this point Nazneen’s sense of the city is far from positive; instead of openness and freedom she experiences fear, and feels like a “maharaneer in her enclosure”: “She was cold, she was tired, she was in pain, she was hungry and she was lost ... She, like Hasina, could not simply go home. They were both lost in cities that would not pause even to shrug” (*BL* 58-59), in part due to their invisibility. While Hasina is treated as invisible because of being a ‘fallen woman,’ Nazneen’s invisibility in London as the other has a lot to do with the fact that in the multicultural metropolis racial or ethnic difference appears no longer to be a puzzling sight, thus her presence as an anonymous observer, invisible in open space, may simultaneously generate a sense of smallness and of intimacy, a fear of being lost and – surprisingly for Nazneen – the empowering experience of finding the way. After asking for directions from a stranger in English (that she has relatively no command of at this point), she feels pleased, since she was “understood and acknowledged. It was very little. But it was something” (*BL* 61) – the first step on the way from a Bengali immigrant to a British Asian, from a subaltern position to a female agency.

¹⁶¹ Here Lees refers to Walter Benjamin’s concept of the *flânerie* as elaborated in *The Arcades Project* (1999).

Female agency in domestic and diaspora space

While in the case of Gupta's protagonist her travelling identity overwrites her diasporic subjectivity and thus it is patriarchy that predominantly forces her into a subaltern position, Nazneen, emphatically portrayed as a diaspora woman in England, is in a twofold subaltern position: subordinate both to dominant society and patriarchy. Her isolation in domestic space is principally the result of her husband's decision: Chanu, partly because of being a member of an educated diasporic elite (like the female protagonist of Gupta's novel) and partly due to cultural and religious traditions, discourages his wife from leaving the home without him and socialising with their neighbours. Nazneen, however, convinces herself that "[s]taying on the estate did not count as going out" (*BL* 46) and makes friends with some of the women, thereby attempting to ease her loneliness and isolation.

On the other hand, Nazneen's isolation is also the result of constrained and submissive sense of self based on fatalism. While Gupta's heroine tries to avoid and defy fate, Nazneen subordinates herself to it entirely – her subaltern position as a woman is 'inherited' from her mother, who believes that "fate will decide everything in the end, whatever route you follow" (*BL* 14) and is therefore not to be probed, fought or defied. Nazneen generally accepts her fate (her arranged marriage, immigration and confinement to the home) with equanimity, and seeks refuge in Islam "to dull her sense and dull her pain" (*BL* 206), "to empty her mind and accept each new thing with grace or indifference" (*BL* 121). Nevertheless, ever so often we get a glimpse of her spirit of defiance in her relationship with Chanu, for example when she proclaims her wish to study English or when she asks him to bring the ill-fortuned Hasina over to England – initiatives that her husband readily turns down. After being lost in the city and outraged by her husband's complacency, Nazneen can hardly contain herself: "She wanted to shout it. Do you know what I did today? I went inside a pub. To use the toilet. Do you think I could do that? ... See what I can do" (*BL* 62-63). Still, her outburst is silent, just like her mutiny:

Nazneen dropped the promotion from her prayers. The next day she chopped two fiery red chillies and placed them, like hand grenades, in Chanu's sandwich. Unwashed socks were paired and put back in his drawer. The razor slipped when she cut his corns. His files got mixed up when she tidied. All her chores, peasants in his princely kingdom, rebelled in turn. Small insurrections, designed to destroy the state from within. (*BL* 63)

Using domestic work as a disguised form of rebellion evokes Joan Riviere's concept of masquerade, where womanliness –manifested here in Nazneen's exaggerated role of the perfect housewife – is merely a mask to hide a repressed female eroticism, a certain phallic rivalry (Hughes 25), and "to avert anxiety and retribution feared from men" (Riviere 91). Nazneen's efforts at fighting patriarchal authority¹⁶² may result in a few vexing wounds but are not intended to overthrow her husband's reign; therefore, when their first child is born, Nazneen gives up "her domestic guerrilla actions," since she has "no time to mess about" (*BL* 100), i.e., she realizes that "adaptation is best achieved through conformity" (Y. Hussain 105) and that rebellion only causes further conflicts. Nonetheless, by the same token that the above passage presents domestic chores as a possible source of resistance, it also implies that the confinement of the devalued domestic space itself can become a site of resistance, recalling bell hooks' radical claim: "Marginality is the space of resistance" (52). Nazneen's endeavours to fight her marginal position in domestic space are, however, first hindered by the birth of her son, and then abruptly terminated by his illness and tragic death.

When Raqib is taken to hospital, the novel follows its typical strategy, referring to Nazneen's mental state in terms of her primary phenomenological experience of the city: "The city shattered. Everything was in pieces ... Frantic neon signs. Headlights chasing the dark. An office block, cracked with the light. These shards of the broken city ... [Raqib] was the centre. The world had rearranged itself around its new core" (*BL* 117-18). While Nazneen's sense of space becomes fragmented and, in a way, condensed yet again, her growing command over her own life is endangered. In a desperate effort to save her son's life, Nazneen decides to fight fate, willing him to live (*BL* 122), and for a brief time she seems to succeed, but eventually Raqib dies, and with him, Nazneen's agency dissipates as well. Just as she projects her feelings and mental state onto urban space, the home as the site of resistance turns into a site of insanity and chaos:

¹⁶² Nazneen's domestic warfare recalls Princess Jeeta's mutiny in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, who, as an indirect response to her husband Anwar's unbearable patriarchal oppression peaking in a hunger strike to force their daughter Jamila into an arranged marriage, takes her revenge by taking over the matters of the family business, cooking Anwar only plain food, "especially prepared to ensure constipation" (208), and keeping him in suspense: "Since his attempt to starve himself to death, Princess Jeeta was, in her own way, starving her husband to death, but subtly, month by month. There was very definite but intangible deprivation. For example, she spoke to him, but only occasionally, and she made sure not to laugh ... once in a while, perhaps for a whole morning, she would be kind, loving and attentive to Anwar, and then, as the smiles returned to his face, she'd cut him dead for a week, until he had no idea where he stood or what was happening to him" (208-209). In *White Teeth*, Alsana uses the same technique of precariousness to punish her husband Samad for secretly sending their son, Magid back to Bangladesh. To make Samad feel the misery of insecurity and constant worrying, she decides "to stop speaking directly to her husband. Through the next eight years she would determine never to say *yes* to him, never to say *no* to him, but rather to force him live like she did – never knowing, never being sure, holding Samad's sanity to ransom" (213-214).

Signs of madness everywhere. The crushing furniture stacked high, spread out, jumbled up. Papers and books strewn liberally – lewdly! – over windowsills, tables, floor. Alarming rugs of every colour, deviously designed to confuse the eye and arrest the heart ... Yellow wallpaper lined up and down with squares and circles. The clutter of frames that fought for space on the walls. Someone, delirious, had wired plates to those same walls so that it appeared that the crockery was trying to escape. (*BL* 139-40)

The room which initially pleased Nazneen with its colourfulness and alleged richness, and then, perceived as disorganized and overcrowded, threatened to choke her, now appears as “a lunatic’s room” (*BL* 139), the spatial embodiment of not only her husband’s ‘silly’ illusions of succeeding in England, and of the grief driving Nazneen insane, but also of her maddening effort to escape her situation, to fight confined-confining space and create her own open space of female agency. The latter interpretation is also underlined by Ali’s direct intertextual reference to Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s 1892 short story “The Yellow Wallpaper,” in which the female character, depressed after child-birth, is restricted to a room by her husband, where her depression eventually descends into psychosis. Her mental condition is symbolised by her obsession with the yellow wallpaper, which she scrapes off the wall to free the woman she believes to see in the pattern – an act some feminist critics interpret as the declaration of freedom from the constraints of patriarchy and domestic space (Cf. Allen, 2009). It is this interpretation that Ali probably consciously draws upon to describe her heroine’s state of mind and struggles against patriarchal oppression, and to assert the triumph of agency over fate, which she promises early on in the novel in the flash-forward scene (*BL* 16).

The process of acquiring agency necessarily involves a degree of hybridization, which goes parallel with the hybridization of diaspora space, as I have previously shown in detail in chapter 1. *Brick Lane* goes one step further in the portrayal of this hybridization: after the reterritorialization (and hybridization) of English cultural space, and the subsequent hybridization of the inhabitants of this diaspora space (most visible in the second generation’s behaviour and hybrid looks), comes another act of reterritorialization, this time from a reversed angle, by the multicultural metropolis. In the second part of the novel, set in 2001, Tower Hamlets is portrayed as bedecked and ‘done up,’ adjusting to multicultural London in terms of representation, which is most visible in the new multiethnic and -religious facade of the restaurants:

Days of the Raj restaurant had a new statue in the window: Ganesh seated against a rising sun, his trunk curling playfully on his breast. The Lancer already displayed Radha-Krishna; Popadum went with Saraswati; and Sweet Lassi covered all the options with a black-tongued, evil-eyed Kali and a torpid soapstone Buddha. ‘Hindus?’ said Nazneen when the trend first started. ‘Here?’ Chanu patted his stomach. ‘Not Hindus. Marketing. Biggest god of all.’ The white people liked to see the gods. ‘For authenticity’” (BL 446).

What we can witness here is the marketing of ethnicity, which for Procter “appears to signify primarily as surface style or fashion in this new version of multicultural London” (“New Ethnicities” 117), and which results in a considerably hybridized, ‘showcased’ diaspora space selling exoticism, an immigrant ghetto commodified into a tourist landscape, and thereby falling into line with London as a marketable transnational space. According to Jackson et al. transnational space is “complex, multidimensional and multiply inhabited” (3),¹⁶³ meaning that the people who enter these spaces come from different backgrounds and positionalities, and stay for various lengths of time: “They may occupy its spaces momentarily (during the consumption of a meal, for example) or for a lifetime (as members of ethnically defined transnational communities)” (3). Drawing on this definition, Tower Hamlets may be perceived as a transnational space both for white Londoners and tourists who come here for an ‘authentic’ cultural experience, and for the Bangladeshi community, which “may have residual affinities to the transnational identities of earlier migrant generations or emergent identities as a result of their own current transnational experiences” (Jackson et al. 3).

Nazneen’s transformation seems to belong to this latter category, to an emerging identity as a British Asian woman with a developing female agency, and with transnational experiences including a growing exposure to British culture and lifestyle, and witnessing individual stories of assimilation and identity search. As for the latter, the text offers two major examples of Bangladeshi women’s assimilation which have an indirect influence on Nazneen’s *Bildung*. The first is witnessed when Nazneen and Chanu pay an unexpected visit at Dr Azad’s, whose wife is, much to their surprise, the epitome of the assimilated immigrant with her short skirt and emphatic cleavage, her eating habits, smoking and drinking – her

¹⁶³ The multiplicity and complexity of Tower Hamlets as a transnational space is also indicated by its changing demographics. As Sandhu notes, Bangladeshis are gradually “supplanted by Somalis and the new wave of white settlers from Russia, Kosovo and Lithuania;” thence they “are finding themselves slowly, subtly estranged from the ghetto they called home. Walk around and you will notice that the sari stores have become designer furniture shops, the dress factories art galleries. Bangladeshis may be wilting into history.”

categorical opinion on the advantages of assimilation in women's lives, however, make Nazneen acknowledge her as a "street fighter" (*BL* 114). The second example of an alternative lifestyle and subjectivity is provided by Nazneen's friend, Razia, who becomes a self-sufficient, independent woman after her husband's death, one who wears a Union Jack sweater and her hair cut short, who smokes and curses, and ignores the community's low opinion of her, who successfully fights her son's drug addiction and takes the chances offered by liberal British culture, who turns domestic space from a temporary immigrant's abode into a real home of a British Asian woman.

Razia's example and friendship, pointing to the formation of a "transnational sisterhood" (Hussain 93), is the first factor that helps Nazneen gradually enter the space of public life in Britain and begin a process of emancipation, while the second comes in the form of work, made possible and necessary when Chanu loses his job and thereby also the hope to return home as "a success" (*BL* 35). Although Nazneen does not leave the confines of domestic space for work, the fact that she contributes to the family's earnings signals a shift in power relations – a working wife considerably undermines Chanu's Muslim male superiority, which he wanted to sustain by his arranged marriage to the "unspoilt girl" (*BL* 22) from the village. As his control over his wife is waning, his complacency gradually fades until she sees him caving in and giving up, "greyed with frustration" and "slighted" (*BL* 203). As Chanu the *babu* turns into a parody of postcolonial identity, so does Chanu the patriarch transform into the shadow of a powerful man when Nazneen, both literally and metaphorically, is "cutting bits off him" (*BL* 91).

The change occurs thirteen years after Nazneen's migration, when she is a grown-up woman with two daughters, she has got accustomed to her life in England, and has learned the language. When she starts work at home as a seamstress, she is much more confident and self-assured, but still lives her life by the guiding principle of fate, which, interestingly, provides the third decisive factor in her identity formation: an adulterous love affair. Nazneen believes that it is fate that tempts her in the form of the young middleman, Karim, who comes to her home regularly for business and in the meantime talks to her about his faith, political views and the harsh reality that the young Bengalis of the community live in. Nazneen is attracted to Karim in the first place, taken by his Western looks and Muslim faith, as well as by what she reads as a stable identity and an unquestioned belief in himself and his place in the world, which is spatially manifested by his presence in domestic space: "He would walk around and fill up the space ... Each time he came now he inhabited the flat a little more" (*BL* 285-86).

However, what Nazneen interprets as a “strong stance” (*BL* 210) is in fact the identity performance of a second-generation immigrant stammering in Bengali and only finding his voice in English, i.e., what she is attracted to is Karim’s hybridity, his ability to be the leader of an Islamic group (the Bengal Tigers) and at the same time to proclaim: “This is my country” (*BL* 212). Karim’s seemingly confident and natural hybridity reveals for Nazneen the possibility of a British Asian subjectivity, while his attention suggests the chance of women’s voice to be heard, since he makes her feel “as if she had said a weighty piece, as if she had stated a new truth” (*BL* 262). Encouraged by Karim, Nazneen attends a few Bengal Tigers meetings and thus takes the next steps towards the possibility of agency, which is manifested in both spatial and social terms. Firstly, as opposed to having walked one step behind Chanu for most of the past decade, now she walks alone in the neighbourhood and appropriates her own diaspora space by following her own trajectories. In Michel de Certeau’s theory, trajectory “suggests a movement, but it also involves a plane projection, a flattening out. It is a transcription” (xviii). Drawing on his claim, Nazneen’s walks in Tower Hamlets may be read as attempts to transcribe diaspora space in her own terms, thereby taking her first diffident steps towards transgressing the laws of community and patriarchy, since, as de Certeau notes, walking “affirms, suspects, tries out, transgresses, respects, etc., the trajectories it ‘speaks’” (99). Secondly, at the meetings she realizes that women may not necessarily be marginalised but also have a place and vote in (and beyond) community matters, which she experiences as an act of female agency that enables her to “alter the course of events, of affairs in the world” (*BL* 242) instead of letting fate to decide.

Subjectivity in the emancipatory city

On a physical level, Nazneen’s emancipation and agency are largely fostered by her intimate relationship with Karim. Although initially she is frightened by the power of her sexual attraction, she eventually gives in to it, convincing herself that Karim is her fate and that “it was not for her to decide” (*BL* 255). While previously she has perceived his influence as emancipatory, when it comes to sexuality, she condemns it as a relapse to a submissive state, triggered by lust and permeated with guilty conscience:

He was the first man to see her naked. It made her sick with shame. It made her sick with desire. They committed a crime. This was a crime and the sentence was death ... Though they began with a gentle embrace, tenderness could not satisfy her, nor could

she stand it, and into her recklessness she drew him like a moth to a flame. In the bedroom everything changed. Things became more real and they became less real ... Out of the bedroom she was – in starts – afraid and defiant. If ever her life was out of her hands, it was now. She had submitted to her father and married her husband; she had submitted to her husband. And now she gave herself up to a power greater than these two, and she felt herself helpless before it. When the thought crept into her mind that the power was inside her, that she was its creator, she dismissed it as conceited. How could such a weak woman unleash a force so strong? She gave in to fate and not to herself. (*BL* 299-300).

The passage clearly indicates the birth of Nazneen's female agency, which, due to moral and religious reasons, and being shocked by the magnitude of her own power (as foreshadowed at the beginning of the novel), she denies right away, resorting to the secure but submissive belief in fatalism. The above lines also display significant similarities with the way Gupta's heroine perceives her affair with the butcher, by way of equating sex with death and by the female protagonist's inability to decide whether the affair is an act of defying fate or, on the contrary, the sign of her submission to it. On the other hand, Nazneen's idea of being the "creator" of her own power, of being in control of this relationship, and being, like the female protagonist of *The Glassblower's Breath*, the "flame" generating desire,¹⁶⁴ clearly suggests her responsibility in the course of events, a (sub)conscious decision and therefore an extent of agency as opposed to passivity.

It is also interesting to compare the above passage with a later scene where Nazneen recalls the events leading up to their affair, where she realises that she is "aware of her body, as though just now she had come to inhabit it for the first time" (*BL* 343). Although Nazneen appears as dominating during the intercourse and feels "helpless" outside the bedroom, her self-awareness when containing herself points to Jessica Benjamin's definition of containment as "the ability to hold oneself, to bear one's feelings without losing or fragmenting oneself – an ability crucial to introspection and self-discovery" (n. pag.). When Nazneen acknowledges her lust and at the same time becomes aware of her body, she displays an act of self-discovery and personal authority, and by doing so she justifies her role as an active agent in the affair, while Karim becomes both the trigger and recipient of her agency.

¹⁶⁴ As I have indicated in chapter 1 in my analysis of *Maps*, in Urdu literature moths are associated with and the symbols of sexual transgression and transgressive desire. See Moore, 8.

Another key to Karim's role in the process of Nazneen's *Bildung* is that his Western looks and strong stance remind her of some ice-skaters she saw in a magazine, a picture that becomes the source of a recurring daydream for her:

Nazneen fell, somehow, into that picture and caught hold of the man's hand. She was shocked to find she was travelling across the ice, on one foot, at terrible speed ... She felt the rush of the wind on her cheeks, and the muscles in her thighs flexing. The ice smelled of limes. The cold air made her flush with warmth from deep down. Applause. She could not see the audience but she heard them. And the man let go of her hand but she was not afraid. She lowered her leg and she skated on. (*BL* 93)

The significance of this daydream lies in Nazneen's bodily sensations of an imagined space and the positive feelings they entail, in its association with Western culture and the accompanying notions of liberalism, freedom and gender equality, as well as in its 'prophetic' vision of being supported by a man and being strong even after letting go of him. Whenever Nazneen watches ice-skating on television, she feels that she is no longer "a collection of hopes, random thoughts, petty anxieties and selfish wants" but "whole and pure," a "new Nazneen ... filled with white light, glory" (*BL* 41). Ice-skating thus becomes the metaphor of both her affair with Karim and her emancipation: an unknown territory that she needs a man to guide her through, a form of movement pointing to a mobile subjectivity, and an unlimited sense of freedom achieved through the process of identity formation.

Nazneen's changing identity is also marked by several scenes of dress-up inspired by ice-skating. In the first part of the novel, Nazneen puts on first Chanu's trousers and then her underskirt, pulling it up to the knees like "white girls": "She pulled the skirt higher, and examined her legs in the mirror. She walked towards the headboard, turning her trunk to catch the rear view, a flash of pants. Close to the wall, eyes to the mirror, she raised one leg as high as she could. She closed her eyes and skated off" (*BL* 141). Nazneen's role-plays as a man, a white woman, and an ice-skater indicate an identity performance as a harmless way of trying out various identity positions, while her subsequent decision "to float free for a while" (*BL* 141) implies her need for agency and freedom.¹⁶⁵ The relatively confined space of the ice-rink thence becomes a spatial metaphor of open space as an enabling space for the construction of alternative identity positions and the discovery of identity as multiple and fluid.

¹⁶⁵ This view is also supported by a later scene where Nazneen comes to the sudden realisation that if she wore Western clothes she could lead a western lifestyle and "roam the streets fearless and proud" (*BL* 277), as well as to the passing thought that "clothes, not fate, made her life" (*BL* 278).

Karim's figure as an 'emancipatory tool' may be interpreted not only in terms of his hybridity, but also as the embodiment of the security and freedom that Nazneen has previously associated with ice-skating. This link is underlined by the fact that both Karim's clothes and the ice-rink have a citrus smell. Nevertheless, it is probably not by chance that Nazneen describes her affair with Karim through another sense, that of vision, and employs the metaphor of the television (her main source of watching ice-skating) in talking about love: "It's like you're watching the television in black and white and someone comes along and switches on the colours" (*BL* 428), she tells Razia. In a way, comparing love to watching television in colours recalls Nazneen's constant looking out of the window in the early years of her immigration – viewing life and love indirectly, through a frame, i.e., with a one-dimensional, restricted vision, experiencing it as an outsider, drawn to the sight but remaining detached. The fact that despite the complex spiritual and physical nature of their relationship Nazneen depicts their love in such a one-dimensional way indicates the possible fault lines of her affection. After Karim changes his 'exotic' looks and starts wearing traditional Bengali clothes, thereby employing an identity performance or what Perfect calls a "cultural performativity" (114), spending most of his time in Nazneen's flat sitting on the sofa constantly lecturing on Islam and exposing a hole in his sock, he loses his sex-appeal, and becomes a mere younger version of Chanu – a mimic man.

Apparently, the only difference between the two men is the direction of their mimicry: when Karim replaces his Western/British Asian looks with "a panjabi-pyjama and a skullcap" (*BL* 376), he performs his cultural identity as a Bangladeshi; in contrast, Chanu mimics the English in terms of clothing, language and behaviour, and prides himself on his English education. At the end of the novel both Chanu and Karim return to their 'homeland' both physically and mentally, apparently believing in a "romanticised version of Bangladeshi identity" (Groes 132) that would resolve their identity crisis. Another similarity between the two men is that they are both tourists in a certain sense: Karim's eventual trip to Bangladesh is not that of an immigrant returning home, but of a second-generation immigrant visiting the roots of his parents – an act of pilgrimage including "a mixture of religious devotion and culture and pleasure" (Urry, *Tourist* 4). In comparison, Chanu displays tourist behaviour in England, when, thirty years after his arrival in London, he takes his family on a sightseeing tour, driven to an admission: "Now that we are going home, I have become a tourist" (*BL* 290).¹⁶⁶ Just as Karim perceives Bangladesh as a simulacrum, Chanu does not experience

¹⁶⁶ See chapter 2 for a more elaborate account of this scene.

reality directly, but sees merely the simulacra of his surroundings in England. Living in Tower Hamlets, Chanu is isolated from the local people and culture, finds pleasures in his phantasmatic version of Englishness while still clinging to many traditional Bengali customs (especially when it comes to the upbringing of his daughters), as well as his vision of Bangladesh as ‘home,’ a nostalgic notion both men believe to see as embodied by Nazneen.

Nazneen, however, is no longer the village girl with a fixed cultural identity and an absorbed submissiveness to patriarchy. At this point in the process of her *Bildung*, she has a nervous breakdown triggered off by several factors: her perception of her adulterous affair as a deadly sin according to the teachings of Islam, the increasing generational tension between Chanu and the girls, their growing debt to Mrs Islam (a respected member of the community who turns out to be a usurer), the worrying letter from Hasina describing her hardships, her fading vision of the village – “The memory of things she knew but no longer saw” (BL 217) – and their imminent return to Bangladesh. During her breakdown Nazneen finds herself where “beyond the body there was nothing” (BL 324) and is reluctant to leave this “dead space” (BL 324), because, similarly to the time when her infant son was taken to hospital, she sees “everything in pieces as if in a smashed mirror” (BL 324). Nazneen’s breakdown also points back to her first solitary walk in the city, when she experienced both her irreducible otherness due to the concomitant cultural markers on her body, and, in her invisibility, the lack of these markers, or more precisely, the sense of her body stripped off of these markers and thereby left with its sheer physical experience of space. Furthermore, the fragmentation of the self, which (as in *The Glassblower’s Breath*) is indicated by the broken mirror metaphor, is once again experienced in terms of the fragmentation of space, including the open space of the ice rink, which Nazneen now interprets as “the demented illusion of freedom” (BL 364). Her depression and collapse, reducing her sense of self to the sense of the body, are on one hand, the signs of her disillusionment with Karim and the freedom she has associated with him. On the other hand, they indicate the victory of agency over fate, leading straight up to the point where she can proclaim: “*I will decide what to do. I will say what happens to me. I will be the one*” (BL 405) [original emphasis].

Realising that Karim “did not have his place in the world. That was why he defended it” (BL 448-49) (i.e., from a phenomenological point of view, he has not lived and experienced space so as to appropriate it as his own place), that he is just as much a foreigner in Bangladesh as she is in England and more of an in-between than she would ever be, Nazneen concludes that she “saw only what she wanted to see” (BL 448) and that the two of

them merely “made each other up” (*BL* 56): “How did Karim see her? The real thing, he said. She was his real thing. A Bengali wife. A Bengali mother. An idea of home. An idea of himself he found in her” (*BL* 454). Similarly to Chanu’s perception of Nazneen as an unspoilt girl from the village, for Karim, Nazneen is the simulacrum of ‘home’ and Bengaliness, while for her he has been the symbol of freedom from patriarchy, a tool to help her find her own agency. Consequently, Nazneen turns down Karim’s marriage proposal and also refuses to return to Bangladesh with Chanu, despite her earlier realisation that “[a]t his core, he was the same as her [...] They took different paths but they had journeyed [...] together” (*BL* 121). Finally ready to defy fate, Nazneen decides to continue her journey alone, thereby breaking the final bonds of patriarchy and asserting herself as an emancipated woman, turning from “a category of oppression into a category of empowerment” (Draga Alexandru n. pag.).

Although empowerment and emancipation are by no means the synonym of the feminist notion of nomadism, Nazneen’s agency can be interpreted as a kind of female nomadic consciousness and therefore somewhat similar to Gupta’s protagonist, while her figure also displays several features of the Braidottian female nomad. By defying both fate and patriarchal authority, Nazneen transgresses the boundaries of her subordinate position, as well as the confines of domestic space and her self-imposed fatalism, questioning her situatedness and fixed place: “What kept her to the corner of the room?” (*BL* 450) Once again, the novel indicates the interconnectedness of female agency and spatial movement. In fact, the turning points in her story and the milestones of her identity formation are all marked by movement: first, when she gets lost in the city but eventually meets the challenge and finds the way home; second, the customary paths she creates for herself on her way to and from the Bengal Tigers meetings, then her journey across the city to meet and say good-bye to Karim; and finally, walking the city with a clear direction and self-confidence as an independent woman. These spatial movements are as much the key to Nazneen’s nomadic identity as the ways in which she subverts a number of cultural traditions and social conventions by committing adultery and then becoming a ‘single woman,’ a breadwinner and, eventually, an entrepreneur in England.

In the upbeat ending, Nazneen seems to gain full female agency: she starts a new life once again, alone with her daughters; she sets up a sewing business, “Fusion Fashions” (*BL* 481) with Razia, continues to send money to Hasina and keeps in touch with Chanu. She has eventually settled in London, marking it as her nomadic territory, and has also become an independent woman; instead of assimilation, she has learned “to adapt to a multicultural

context” (Hussain 95). The closing scene of the novel shows Nazneen in an ice-rink, her symbol of freedom, signifying her settlement in British culture: “To get to the ice physically – it hardly seemed to matter. In her mind she was already there” (*BL* 492). For several critics the ending of *Brick Lane* “jars” (Upstone, *British Asian* 169); they interpret it as too positive, unrealistic or even banal, especially when considering Razia’s idealistic claim that “[t]his is England ... You can do whatever you like” (*BL* 492) or a previous scene where, alone in the flat, Nazneen dances to and sings along a song on the radio, “filling her lungs from the bottom, letting it all go loose” (*BL* 489). Apart from the obvious change in the tone and Nazneen’s unexpected ‘happy outburst,’ the ending is criticised for celebrating the Western notion of individual progress, for presenting British Asian identity as normalised, and England as a “Happy Multicultural Land,” to borrow Zadie Smith’s term (465). Sebastian Groes, for example, concludes that Nazneen eventually learns to accept her agency by “reformulating herself in terms of the West” and by “exploiting her economic skills in a new national narrative of Britishness” (132-133), a point of view which suggests that Nazneen’s emancipation, manifested in a ‘new’ identity, is the result of her assimilation and submission to Western capitalism. Her agency, as Procter puts it, is “not channelled in an obviously ‘positive’ manner,” thus producing “an odd kind of emancipatory ending” (“New Ethnicities” 118), which fails to offer a proper political alternative instead of the essentialist views on race and identity that the rest of the novel deconstructs.

Although by no means wishing to contradict these opinions, my interpretation of the novel’s ending, approached from the aspect of space and identity, offers a slightly different view on Nazneen’s emancipation and agency. Analysing *Brick Lane* as a female *Bildungsroman*, where the heroine’s identity crisis is generated not by a confusion of cultural identity but by the conflict of fate and agency, patriarchy and emancipation, I see the eventual outcome of Nazneen’s identity formation not as a failure of diasporic identity, nor as a celebratory hybridity, but as an instance of what Upstone calls the successful “assertions of the self” (*British Asian* 170) – an alternative femininity as a female nomad and a ‘fusion identity’: the conscious and voluntary choice of certain aspects of ‘Britishness’ and ‘Bengaliness,’ and their transfusion into a multiple identity best suiting the individual’s needs and goals.

Ali offers several alternatives of femininity for and through the female characters of her novel. Her representation of the first- and second-generation women of the Bangladeshi diaspora signals various degrees of assimilation and hybridization generated by outside forces

(e.g. dominant discourse, racism and discrimination, the expectations of British society to adjust and assimilate); yet there is also a distinctive element of inner drive displayed in these women's identity formation. The individual stories of diaspora women in *Brick Lane* indicate different forms and degrees of emancipation as they learn to take a greater control over their lives and make their voices heard in their home. There is Mrs. Azad and her daughter, fully assimilated to western lifestyle and values for the sake of freedom, and Razia, whose hybrid looks and westernised behaviour are as much a rebellion against the oppression of women as an act of resistance against a marginal status in Britain – it is a deliberate stance against both outdated Bangladeshi morals and white racism. As for second-generation diaspora women, hybridization is the unavoidable result of their Bangladeshi roots and British upbringing. Shahana's hybrid identity is portrayed parallel with intergenerational conflict and as a form of defiance, exemplified by her assertion: "I didn't ask to be born here" (*BL* 181). In contrast, Bibi is more of "a cultural navigator" (Y. Hussain 82), making her own decisions concerning her behaviour and successfully navigating between the contexts of the two cultures, i.e., she can "switch codes as appropriate" (Y. Hussain 108).

In Nazneen's case (similarly to the emancipation of Alsana of *White Teeth* and Princess Jeeta in *The Buddha of Suburbia*), the change in her identity is subtler and more gradual; she eventually finds a kind of balance between Bengali traditions and western feminism, creating her very own fusion identity on her own terms and with the help of London, the emancipatory city as an open space. In her editor's introduction, Lees explains Iris Marion Young's notion of the emancipatory city in the following way:

For Young the city is emancipatory because it promises spaces of relative anonymity, heterogeneity, openness, and change, in which otherness can become unfixed from any totalizing sense of community or self-identity: 'City dwelling situates one's own identity and activity in relation to a horizon of a vast variety of other activity, and the awareness that this unknown, unfamiliar activity, affects the conditions of one's own' (1990: 237–8). (Lees 11)

For Nazneen, the openness of urban space is established by the possibilities of being invisible yet able to assert her self as she wishes; of being a member of a community and thereby achieving a sense of belonging, but also an individual with the power to discover alternative ways of belonging as well; of keeping her cultural traditions and religion as the core of her identity, but fusing them with western notions of individuality and self-sufficiency to create a

fluid and multiple identity; of seemingly settling in one place but still developing a female nomadic consciousness that resists any form of fixity. What Nazneen's identity formation and presence in the city imply here is that, as Grosz asserts, "bodies are not culturally pre-given, built environments cannot alienate the very bodies they produce" (*Sexual* 249), and that "the city is made and made over into the simulacrum of the body, and the body, in its turn, is transformed, 'citified', urbanized as a distinctively metropolitan body" (*Sexual* 242). In Nazneen's figure Ali creates both a metropolitan diasporan and the prototype of a new gendered British subject, whose presence may be criticised but certainly cannot be overlooked. The final scene where Nazneen enters the ice rink in her sari and skates, enjoying the sensation of movement and space, signals not only the birth of this new subjectivity, but also marks the point when she finally enters and fully inhabits the open space of London (and England), the site of her mental and physical trajectories and the enabling, emancipatory location of her multiple identities.

Besides being a new gendered British subject, Nazneen is also a postmodern, post-postcolonial urban walker, a twenty-first century *flâneuse*, who, like Elizabeth Wilson's (1992) modernist figure, is able to reclaim "the pleasures and possibilities of the city long denied" her (Lees 13-14), while she engages in what Virginia Woolf (1927) referred to as "street haunting." Her story also recalls Parson's definition of the city as an open space "in which people come alive, where they expose, acknowledge, and address the discordant parts of themselves and one another" (226). Furthermore, for Nazneen as a female nomad, space is "'smooth' or open ended": she "can rise up at any point and move to any other" (Massumi xiii), that is, she can change her subject positions and determine her own paths. Similarly to the female protagonist of *The Glassblower's Breath*, her nomadism is characterised by transgressing boundaries and subverting conventions, by resisting fixity and attachment, and the ability to experience belonging as becoming. My analysis of Gupta's and Ali's novels concludes in the argument that although the identity positions and mobile subjectivities of the cosmopolite, the travelling self, the diasporian and the female nomad may differ, they also intertwine and overlap in the case of the two female protagonists. This correlation brings us to a better understanding of the multiple identities and diasporic subjectivity of British Asian women, as well as to the interpretation of movement and urban public space as locations of female agency and the politics of location to speak from.

(BEYOND) CONCLUSION

My dissertation investigated the interconnectedness of space, movement and identity in a selection of contemporary British Asian novels. The close reading of novels by Nadeem Aslam, Meera Syal, Hanif Kureishi, Nirpal Singh Dhaliwal, Monica Ali and Sunetra Gupta examined certain recurrent patterns in British Asian diaspora literature in order to reveal the similarities and differences informing the heterogeneity of diasporic experiences and their literary representations. The dissertation also offered new perspectives concerning alternative regional, post-ethnic, and gendered diasporic identities, highlighting the diverse ways of the construction, transformation and perception of the hybrid cultural identity of British Asians.

Within these possible variations, I explored the ways in which space, movement and identity become interrelated, reciprocal, mutually constructing and implicating each other, and inseparable within the context of British-Asian diasporic consciousness and subjectivity. My dissertation put a special emphasis on studying the pivotal role of space and movement in mimicry, identity performance and performativity, identity positions, agency and subjectivity – as represented in my chosen corpus. Throughout my analysis I applied a new interdisciplinary perspective in the study of British Asian diaspora literature, introducing a complex theoretical-critical approach situated at the intersection of cultural, postcolonial and diaspora studies, complemented by relevant theories of human geography, sociology, and tourism, and other disciplines studying the interconnectedness of space and identity, identity and movement, movement and space.

The conclusions that follow from the analysis are based on the close reading of diaspora novels that I call ‘classic’: mainly realist narratives (and a piece of poetic prose, *The Glassblower’s Breath*) that feature prevalent tropes of diaspora literature, such as hybridity, mimicry, belonging and identity crisis, as well as several variations on these motifs. Yet, the metamorphoses that diasporic subjectivity and the relationship of space and identity involve may be approached from other positionalities as well, and these positionalities are often manifested in different, non-realist narrative strategies. Different texts may invite different readings, especially if they position themselves in diverse ways, exceeding the ‘simple’ category of a diaspora novel. Some notable British diaspora writers have made conscious attempts to break out from the ‘critical ghetto’ of diaspora fiction, either by extending the motifs of diaspora and migration into universal allegorical structures (for instance, many of V.

S. Naipaul's novels, or Salman Rushdie's fiction since *The Satanic Verses*), by blending these issues with others (like Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* or Hanif Kureishi's *Something to Tell You* [2009]), or by portraying a twenty-first century post-ethnic reality (such as *Tourism*, Malkani's *Londonstani* and Govinden's *Graffiti My Soul*).

It may be unusual yet logical, then, to use my concluding chapter to tentatively expand the limits set by the foregoing analyses and, as it were, hybridize them by addressing the way the themes and motifs investigated in the body of the dissertation are reworked by an experimental, postmodernist diaspora novel which I have repeatedly referred to in footnotes throughout the dissertation. Both drawing on and pointing beyond 'classical' diaspora fiction, Suhayl Saadi's *Psychoraag* (2004) is an ideal place to conclude my investigation, as it stands here for the diversity of positionalities; its analysis concludes my investigation by indicating ways of extending and transcending it, thus possibilities for further research. Saadi's novel addresses a hitherto unexplored facet of the South Asian diaspora by positioning itself in the cultural space of Scotland, that is, it defines itself both as diaspora fiction and as a post-devolutionary Scottish novel.¹⁶⁷ Although, similarly to *Maps, Anita and Me* and *The Black Album*, it shifts its focus away from the capital, it is nevertheless markedly different from them in its own cultural positioning and its treatment of the issue of (personal, regional, national and cultural) identity. The most significant difference is that *Psychoraag* is, from the aspect of poetics, an experimental novel; it is not simply a coming-of-age story, a documentary of a community or phenomenon, revolutionary in the cultural milieu it portrays, but a self-reflexive, postmodern text using Rushdiesque narrative strategies and allegorical formations, speaking in a metaphysical voice and suggesting parallels with other art forms.

During the six hours of the *Junnune Show*¹⁶⁸ that the protagonist, DJ Zaf, spends in his cubicle at Radio Chaandni, he embarks on a mental journey recalling his parents' "epic voyage" (P 129) from Pakistan to Scotland, their early days of settlement and the creation of diaspora space in Glasgow, and he laments on the past events and loves that have defined him. Despite the constant shifts and leaps from past to present and future, from reality to memory and hallucination, from song lyrics to intertextual references, Zaf's stream of consciousness, combined with a first-person "radio DJ-narrator technique" (Mitchell,

¹⁶⁷ The term devolutionary refers to the politically informed Scottish literature produced and published in the period of 1979-1997, that is, to literary production up to the Scottish devolution of 1997. For further reference see Brown 5-10 and Schoene 1-6.

¹⁶⁸ *Junnune* means madness, a trans-like state in Urdu, and is thus a direct reference to the "psycho" of the title. The definition is provided by the glossary of *Psychoraag*; henceforth all translations of the foreign words in the novel will refer to this source.

“Psychoraag”), offers a highly complex yet seamless narrative. What distinguishes this text from the novels discussed in the dissertation is primarily the fact that its text(uality) becomes a major character and agent: questions concerning the identity of the narrator-protagonist become questions concerning the identity of the text. In my view, the lyrics and intertextual references¹⁶⁹ serve as ‘cultural markers’ of a hybrid diasporian, portraying Zaf as an educated polyglot ‘at home’ in the world – a cosmopolite at heart – while they also point to a “post-ethnic ‘Scottish’ identity” (Macdonald 87), which may incorporate and condense a multitude of ethnicities and cultures at once, but is identical with none of them, and this way it provides a new perspective in understanding diasporic identity.

Although Saadi’s novel is not unlike the diaspora novels I analysed in this dissertation inasmuch as it also deals with the metamorphosis of space and (diasporic) identity, given its experimental form and the unusual portrayal of this relationship, its position in the corpus is closer to that of Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*. Recording Zaf’s journeys through time and space, *Psychoraag* is, to borrow and paraphrase David Harvey’s (1990) term, a ‘literary time-space compression’: a story woven from overlapping and interconnected time scales, physical and mental spaces, creating an intricate, flexible and fluid pattern of music, mood and memory or, as Saadi puts it, “states of altered consciousness, overlappings of the self ... [an] efflorescence of liminality” (qtd. in Mitchell, Interview), which overrule and transgress temporal and spatial boundaries. The novel positions itself first and foremost in language and music; the narrative itself follows the musical form of the *raag*.¹⁷⁰

Saadi’s experimental text is also created by the protagonist’s unique experiences of time, space, as well as of temporal and spatial borders. The best known fictional example of such experiments is *The Satanic Verses*, which elevates the poetics of in-between spaces to a

¹⁶⁹ Intertextual references vary from Hebrew and Muslim mythology, to Scottish historical figures and literary works, such as Robert Burns’s “The Tarbolton Lassies,” as well as to Persian and Urdu literature and culture, e.g. the *Bustan* and the *Gulistan* by the thirteenth-century Persian poet Sa’adi Shirazi, Jalaluddin Rumi’s Sufi poetry, Lollywood (the Pakistani film industry based in Lahore) and, most emphatically, the *raag* or *raga*, the most celebrated form of Indian music.

¹⁷⁰ The glossary at the end of the novel offers the following definition of *raag*: “a pattern of notes in Indian music used as the basis for melodies and improvisations; a piece of music based on a particular *raag*. *Raags* convey various emotions; such as anger, love, sadness, humour, wonder, fear and peace; and are classified according to times of the day, month or season. Personalised descriptions of a *raag* enable a musician to meditate on its characteristics and to unite his or her personality with a particular mood and, thereby, instil the same mood in the audience” (P 428). According to Peter Lavezzoli, “North Indian ragas correspond to specific times of the day, typically divided into six time-zones: sunrise, morning, afternoon, sunset, early evening and late night. Only the correct raga for a certain time of the day can be played or sung with authenticity” (4). Although Zaf’s “psychoraag” only lasts from midnight to six a.m., that is, it encompasses the periods of late night and sunrise, the six hours of the show may as well refer to the six time-zones and the different emotions the *raags* corresponding to these time scales evoke.

whole new level as it depicts its protagonists in the in-between space *par excellence* – in the air. Falling out of the exploded plane above the English Channel, the protagonists watch fragments of the plane falling and floating, such as “the debris of the soul, broken memories, sloughed-off selves, severed mother-tongues, violated privacies, untranslatable jokes, extinguishing futures, lost loves, the forgotten meaning of hollow, booming words, *land, belonging, home*” (Rushdie, *Satanic* 4). According to Monika Reif-Hülser, Gibreel and Chamcha’s miraculous passage through the air is “the paradigmatic literary evocation of a space in-between as well as the creation of a literary space in-between” for “imaginary transgressions” and “borderland experiences” (273), while the transmutation of the protagonists into “Gibreelsaladin Farishtachamcha” in the “most insecure and transitory of zones” (Rushdie, *Satanic* 5) suggests that “the old boundaries of space and time are under attack” (Reif-Hülser 74). In my view, Rushdie’s description of the air, where “anything becomes possible” (*Satanic* 5), and of his characters’ prolonged fall, not only points to the metaphor of metamorphosis in relation to immigrant experience but also evokes a sense of time-space compression – the air in Rushdie’s novel thus corresponds to the space of the cubicle in *Psychoraag*, the very place of Zaf’s transgressions and metamorphosis – in a text in which Zaf is “on the air” most of the time.

In my interpretation, Zaf’s cubicle is a metaphor of time-space compression, which follows from the mental movements that Zaf makes in the relatively confined time-space of *The Junnune Show*: he revisits his parents’ life back in Pakistan and their secret escape to Scotland, their initial years of immigrant life and his childhood memories of the diasporic condition, past journeys and past loves, as well as their Glaswegian present/presence and pre-projections of future events and movements in the form of flash-forward scenes – that is, several decades and countries are comprised in, and compressed into, six hours and a twenty-by-twenty feet place. The time-space compression of the cubicle thus becomes a metonymic location of diasporic existence where, with the help of music, Zaf can journey through spaces and times until “the movements of his own body were becomin alien to him” and he cannot decide whether he is “outside of himself or inside of himself” (*P* 185). His sensory and somewhat psychedelic experiences eventually point to a unique perception and process of identity formation, when Zaf claims that “[b]y the end of every six-hour session, [he] would have become the room. And, as the weeks had gone on, he had found it more and more difficult to define an existence outside of Radio Chaandni and his life on the air” (*P* 13). His words indicate that he internalises this compression in such a way that he eventually identifies

himself with the cubicle and all that it metaphorises, while the process also works in the opposite direction, becoming a potentially infinite mental expansion; thus, his figure signals an alternative, Rushdiesque take on hybridity, the formation of diasporic consciousness and subjectivity. Before reaching this decisive point of self-identification, Zaf's past experiences as a diasporic child and young man in Glasgow do not differ considerably from those of the characters in my chosen corpus, just as Saadi's portrayal of the formation of diaspora space largely follows that of the previously analysed novels. Thus, for all its experimental verve, many of the findings of my investigations seem to be relevant in the case of *Psychoraag* as well.

The first important finding of my dissertation is that, at least in the context of diaspora, the interconnectedness of space and identity involves a mutual hybridization, a transfusion and transmutation of both cultural spaces and identities through a constant, though often unwelcome, interaction. Hybridization is responsible for the creation of diaspora space, and it is an unavoidable aspect of diasporic identity formation. My analysis of *Maps for Lost Lovers*, *Anita and Me*, and *Brick Lane* shows that first-generation diasporians are generally characterised by a performed, lenient collective memory of, and a longing for, a Rushdiesque imaginary homeland, as well as by a homing desire for a place to belong to. This need for a sense of belonging is a primary factor in the creation of diaspora spaces: a place may be produced as a diaspora space by a diasporic community's collective expressions of identity and belonging. The portrayal of space in the novels analysed suggests that these practices also foster the creation of multicultural space, while urban, suburban and rural space trigger the creation of diaspora spaces and hybrid subjectivities, who hybridize diaspora space from 'the inside.'

In *Psychoraag*, Saadi portrays the creation of diaspora space in a uniquely hybrid cultural space: postcolonial Glasgow as "Migra Polis" (P 310), "the desert of the soul" (P 390). The novel's description is confined to racialised inner city spaces and the "petit bourgeois Punjabi folk of Glasgae" (P 334), who, like the diaspora subjects in Aslam's novel, attempt to fight the feeling of transience and placelessness by reterritorializing the cultural space of the city through various cultural practices, and thereby they hybridize space both culturally and linguistically. Pollokshields, for example, is referred to in local slang as "The Shiels," while "Kinnin Park" is known by the hybrid name of "Wee Faisalabad" (*wee* meaning little is Scottish and Faisalabad referring to the village the immigrants came from);

it is a place reterritorialized and terrorized by the second-generation “Kinnin Park Boys ... a gang of about thirty or so lads” from the “*barathrie*” (P 102),¹⁷¹ who had taken over the crime scene in the immigrant neighbourhoods. For the Kinnin Park immigrants outside the gang, Glasgow is “the end” where there can be “nae mair crossins, nae mair lang loops across the waruld” (P 72), where they are “travelling salesmen without a motel, gypsies without a caravan” (P 42-43) – homeless nomads struggling to take root in an alien soil, confined to a fixed place and territory to move around in.

Similarly to Kinnin Park and the immigrant neighbourhood in *Maps*, the Shiels endeavours to resist any interaction or chance of assimilation. Being one of the sandstone tenements in Glasgow, it is portrayed as a “town enclosed within a town” (P 115): “Aye, the Shiels wis a skin of sorts, an armour against the scaldin winds of an all-white Alba ... Halaal butchers, subcontinental grocers ... religious bookshops ... Silent churches with no visible congregations. *Masjids*¹⁷² secreted in tenement flats devoid even of Glasgow light” (P 379). Similarly to the immigrant neighbourhood in *Maps*, the Shiels is an immigrant ghetto created as much from the inside as from the outside: it is a confined, peripheral space where all the houses “faced inwards ... built to be blocked off,” thus “it wis possible for someone to live and die and never venture over the railway lines” (P 376). For Zaf’s parents (lovers eloping from their spouses and children), Glasgow and Pollokshields offered a chance to “be safe from prying eyes, ears, tongues” and live “hermeneutic lives” (P 205), that is, it was hoped to be a safe place protecting them both from the shadows of the past and the ever-present dangers of assimilation. For Zaf, however, the Shiels is a place which diaspora subjects yearn to run away from, since, in his words, in “ScotPak society ... Nuthin was fixed and the community wis so small that, if you had a problem, there wis nowhere to run except into yourself” (P 175).

From the point of view of the Pakistani diaspora in Glasgow, the process of assimilation is (as always) inevitably most visible in the second generation. As Zaf notes, the immigrants’ “sons and daughters had gone the opposite direction and had become Scots ... they had sipped of the waters of the Clyde and had become cold killers. And they were swearin ... in a mixture of Glaswegian and Faisalabadi” (P 242-43). What is particularly interesting about this quote is that the Kinnin Park Boys are identified as Scots yet portrayed as bilingual, i.e., equally rooted in Scottish and Pakistani culture. This implies that like Scots

¹⁷¹ A person’s extended family; a clan.

¹⁷² A mosque.

Asianness, Scottishness itself is a hybrid entity and identity, owing to Scotland's assimilation and hybridization both as part of Britain and as the host country of the South Asian diaspora.

As exemplified by Saadi's depiction, diaspora spaces are constantly in formation and do not have fixed boundaries, they may take up various shapes, sizes and locations within multicultural spaces and may also intersect with them, that is, their hybridity has both spatial, cultural and human quotients. In chapter 1 I identified three levels of diaspora space – the home, the immigrant neighbourhood and the city/village (the fourth, most extended level, being Britain itself); and examined two aspects of the creation of diaspora space. The first is the hybridization of traditional English cultural space, which takes place in a constant interplay of deterritorialization and reterritorialization; the second is provided by the various cultural, social and religious practices which appropriate diaspora space. The hybridization of space and identity may involve fears of abjection and the consequent drawing of borders, yet, due to the various degrees and forms of interaction between the two cultures, it is a metamorphosis that proves to be unavoidable. Saadi provides the following description of the mutual impact on, and change of, white Glaswegians and immigrants:

These were ... the *kisaan*¹⁷³ who had powered the buses, the underground trains, the machines of the sweatshop underwear-manufacturers. The whole of Glasgow had walked in their footsteps and worn their clothes. With bare soles they had trodden out new, hard paths along the Clyde and they had clothed the lily-white bodies of whole generations of Scots and then, later, they had filled their stomachs, too. You eat what you are. If that wis the case, then Glasgae wis Faisalabad a hundred times over. (*P* 242-43)

What the quotation implies is that the immigrants' locatedness or embeddedness in Glasgow transforms it into some 'immigrant city,' which may provide a chance for reterritorialization and a consequent acquiring of a sense of belonging, but it first and foremost disempowers and dehumanises the diaspora subject. The process of dehumanisation makes the presence of first-generation immigrants basically invisible, metonymic – they may have been the predecessors of current native Glaswegians, but they have already vanished physically, leaving behind nothing but the paths they had trodden out, the clothes they had laboured on, and their cuisine to feed 'Scottish stomachs.' In my view, interaction here is strongly metonymic, since Saadi's

¹⁷³ A peasant or peasants.

use of the word “consuming” suggests that Glaswegians may assimilate into Asian culture, but their transformation into ‘immigrants’ is, in a way, an act of cannibalism – a highly unusual aspect and representation of immigrant experience.

Similarly to immigrant experience, diaspora experience – encompassing the creation of hybrid diaspora space and subjects – necessarily brings about a sense of dislocation, placelessness, and in-betweenness, generated by the discrepancies between the dominant culture and the roots. These spatial aspects of diaspora experience may be approached from the perspective of belonging – my second main argument is that there are diverse ways in which diasporians search for a sense of belonging to a place, a community, a human relationship, or even to an ideology or abstract idea. In *Maps for Lost Lovers* the diasporic community displays a strong attachment to the lost homeland and a certain Weilian rootlessness, that is, unbelonging in their own diasporic community. *Brick Lane* and *Anita and Me*, on the other hand, emphasise the sense of belonging created by the diaspora community, and the rules and traditions it has ‘imported’ from the homeland. Belonging, in this case, is first and foremost understood both as a way of self-identification and as imaginary shared belongings (Cf. Ferreday 29). While *Maps*, *Brick Lane* and *Anita* portray the diasporian’s search for a sense of belonging to a certain ethnic, religious or local community, Shahid of *The Black Album* chooses belonging in pop culture and in movement as an alternative for belonging to a fundamentalist group. One of the important attributes of movement is its ability to turn spaces into lived places and to foster one’s sense of belonging to a place: in Aslam’s novel, for instance, these processes are facilitated by the act of mapping. On the other hand, the rigidity and stasis of a place, accompanied by situatedness and rootedness experienced as a threat, a spatial confinement, a paralysis-like state, may in fact serve as a trigger for movement. Thus, movement can be read as the spatial manifestation of the diasporian’s in-betweenness and search for identity and a sense of belonging, as I have argued in my analysis of *Anita and Me*, *The Black Album* and *The Buddha of Suburbia*.

In *Psychoraag*, the three basic levels where belonging is experienced and manifested are the locale (the city of Glasgow), language and music. When Zaf, the DJ claims that he “[w]anted to share himself with the whole of Glasgow” (P 330), that he needs his voice “go out to millions (well, hundreds) of people, all over Glasgow and beyond” (P 328) and hopes that “his breath, his being, would go out to the silent ones” (P 128), he expresses a wish not only to be heard and to be able to share himself but also to achieve a renewed sense of

belonging to the diaspora and, even more importantly, to create his own community of listeners as well, which points back to the understanding of belonging as both self-identification and as shared imaginary possessions. Saadi's emphasis on the interrelatedness of community and belonging evokes Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), also featuring the radio metaphor and the postcolonial allegory of the Conference, which comes to existence through the telepathic abilities of Saleem Sinai and which is an idealised metaphor of a fantastic, plural, imagined community where ethnic and cultural identity are irrelevant. In the previous chapters I have identified different ways of community building: in Aslam's novel, several exclusive communities were built based on kinship, in *Anita and Me* the Kumars created their extended family on the basis of their shared immigrant experience, while in Kureishi's *The Black Album* (and Smith's *White Teeth*), it was the second generation's in-betweenness and identity crisis, accompanied by their experience of racial discrimination and abuse that made them turn to religion in the first place and fostered the organisation of a fundamentalist group. In contrast, Zaf's emphasis on the shared attribute of being Glaswegian suggests the possibility of building a community not on the basis of kinship, diasporic experience, religion, or nationality but on a regional identity. His aim to share himself reveals a desire to overcome his in-betweenness and identity crisis by connecting with Glaswegians and creating a community through music and language, thus manifesting Saadi's conception of music as "a unifying force, both in the individual and society at large" ("The Gods"), which Zaf translates as a relationship of love: "They were his. An he wis theirs forever. Lovers on the ayre" (P 333-34).

When Zaf calls out to his "*Junnunies*" (P 97) and for a madness which he perceives as "a means to sanity ... a lunacy of the will" (P 402), the final night of *The Junnune Show* becomes a manifesto of his "striving for unity" (Saadi, "Songs" 131) for a "community-in-becoming" (Ashley 136), regardless of ethnicity and cultural identity – a community that can influence the social and spatial composition of space, and, as Zaf claims, "redraw aw the maps" (P 208). "Mibbee that wis what this night wis about," he ponders, "the stuff he wis playin, it wis a first for a South Asian radio station—mibbee he wis tryin, single-handedly, to build a bridge" (P 92) between East and West, white Scottish and Scots Asian, calling for an equality based on location, since, despite the inevitable ethnicity of Radio Chaandni, as he says, "in our hearts, we are all Glaswegian" (P 360). In my view, the most thought-provoking aspect of this identification is that it signals a considerable shift from the first generation's clinging to imaginary homelands (as portrayed in, for example, *Maps* and *Brick Lane*) and a

second generation individual's sense of belonging to a particular location (Karim of *The Buddha* as a Londoner) to the possibility of a place identity¹⁷⁴ for a whole community – including diasporians *and* the white British – in the host country that has become home.

Another striking aspect of identity and belonging in *Psychoraag* lies in its musical narrative style and special language, through which the novel positions itself as a hybrid cultural production. While the novels I analysed were written in standard English, with the occasional Urdu or Punjabi word (the only exception being *Anita and Me*, with Meena's 'Brummie' accent – but even this is a novel coined in the recognisable mode of realism), Saadi's language is a hybrid dialect made up of Urdu, English and Glaswegian vernacular, a regional variation of Hinglish, which indicates Scotland's "intrinsically polyglot demotic" (K. Innes 302) and also follows the tradition of the Scottish 'devolutionary' novel of writing in the demotic.¹⁷⁵ Music may be interpreted as yet another form of language here, and it occupies a central position in the novel, as a means of getting in touch with the audience (and the readership), of evoking memories, conveying thoughts and various mental states, and indicating a carnivalistic, almost chaotic hybridity and cultural diversity. The protagonist's song choices from Eastern and Western music, or as he calls them, "Wanderin soangs, a narrative ae the night" (*P* 401), provide the spine and frame of the narrative of *Psychoraag*, and they are also interconnected by means of flashbacks and flash-forwards: the music triggers memories and memories inspire the music, thus creating Zaf's very own "psychoraag."

Since *raag* is generally defined as a piece of music conveying particular emotions, "psychoraag" may be interpreted as Zaf's attempt to translate himself/his self into language, or, more precisely, multiple languages,¹⁷⁶ into polyglotism, and, when words fail him, into music: "Zaf had been unsure whether he could actually put what he was thinkin as feelin into words. No, it would probably come out either as a long bloody scream or else as music" (*P* 19). What I find most unique about Zaf's use of music instead of language, as well as Saadi's use of the *raag* as a narrative form is that, as opposed to *Anita and Me*, music here is not a

¹⁷⁴ I borrow the term "place identity" from Proshansky et al. (1983) and use it to denote a situatedness and rootedness through an emotional bonding with a place.

¹⁷⁵ Writing in the demotic is a trend introduced by James Kelman, Irvine Welsh, Duncan McLean and Gordon Legge and manifested in a linguistic diversity embraced by several recent Scottish writers, such as Des Dillon, Anne Donovan and Matthew Fitt. See Watson, 163.

¹⁷⁶ Saadi explains the role of language in the novel as follows: "[E]very tongue talks into being a universe; so, allowing tongues to dance up close with one another results in a *raag* of lunacy, a cosmic song" ("In Tom Paine's" 31).

mere tool to strengthen a collective cultural identity, but a self-reflexive poetic and cultural metaphor, which hybridizes both the language and the text itself. Furthermore, as the text is written predominantly in English, the reference to an Indian musical genre as the main signifier of the text entails a double border-crossing, both in terms of genre and culture. By transgressing cultural borders, Saadi's text may be interpreted as a linguistic counter-colonisation of English literature, while the term "psychoraag" appears to be a multicultural title: "psycho" indicates Western culture and "raag" points to Eastern, thus the identities of both cultures are somewhat corroded, questioned and hybridized.

From the point of view of Western culture, "psychoraag" may also be interpreted as the metonym of Zaf's stream of consciousness, manifested in "wandering songs" (P 401) and easy-flowing language, mental and musical movement, which serves as a metaphor of the diasporian's identity formation and construction, and provides the cultural positioning of both the protagonist and the narrative. While in case of the previously analysed characters cultural hybridity was chiefly manifested in language, looks and/or behaviour, for Zaf it is the music he plays at the "multicultural, multiethnic, polyglottal stop as a radio station" (P 188) that provides him with a "politics of location" (Rich) to speak from and defines him as a hybrid, which is apparent in the following sentence as well: "In places, the notes would merge and, from somewhere, there would arise a third tune, one that nobody had ever written but which sounded better than either of its component parts" (P 239). This "third tune" sounds like a vocal counterpart of Bhabha's concept of third space and hybridity as a third entity, and indicates Saadi's alternative take on identity construction: although Zaf initially claims to be "a sample," that is, a fragmented, faulty representation both in Scotland and in Pakistan, he later realises that his identity "lay not in a flag or in a particular concretisation of a transcendent Supreme Being but in a chord, a bar, a vocal reaching beyond itself" (P 210). While Zaf previously identified himself according to his region (as a Glaswegian), his words here suggest an identity position beyond spatial concerns since it is music that describes and defines him; when he claims, "music an soang ... That's whit Ah'm about" (P 208-9), he lays claim to an identity constructed and positioned in and through music.

Psychoraag also provides an inflection on the third basic concern of my dissertation, namely the vital role of positioning: I have argued that the concepts of mimicry, performativity and performance are crucial for understanding the British Asian diaspora subject's identity formation and construction. Furthermore, these concepts offer ways to

address an exciting aspect of the diasporians' sense of self and, by extension, their sense of place as well. The various places and cultural spaces that the protagonists inhabit, frequent or strive to belong to, invite and generate diverse forms of role-play, mimicry, masquerade and theatrical performance of a constructed, longed for, or assimilated self. As my analyses have indicated, the concept of belonging is interconnected with performativity and identity performance inasmuch as they all serve as points of reference in terms of one's self-identification (e.g. performing identity as essentialised and fixed, belonging to a certain location, as is the case in *Maps* and, to a certain extent, *Psychoraag* as well), and can become important tools in the diasporic subject's Bhabhaian mimicry for survival and mimicry as resistance as well.

As for the former, the figures of Meena in *Anita and Me* and Shahid, for instance, suggest how mimicry and identity performance form an indispensable part of identity construction, signalling the desire to conform to dominant discourses on the body and to create a sense or illusion of belonging. In *Psychoraag* Zaf performs his identity on the radio as Asian, although he knows that his Asianness is a case of pure mimicry applied by the immigrant in order to survive in alien space (here in a place where he feels alienated) and to fit in. As Shahid performed his identity as a Muslim to be able to belong to Riaz's group, so does Zaf perform himself as an Asian to meet the expectations of the radio station with an "intense Asian-ness" (*P* 92) and of his predominantly Asian audience that he entertains with the Asian songs of their choice and addresses in Urdu, Punjabi or Bengali. On the other hand, for Zaf, who "had never known where his own reality lay" (*P* 279), identity performance on the air, through music and language, is also a chance to become "the man ae a thousand tongues" (*P* 173) and to remain anonymous, i.e., not to be seen and visually identified as the Other, and thereby avoid any potential trouble that self-identification as an Asian may entail – though it must be noted that invisible as he may be on air, he is constantly checking his reflection in the windows and mirrors, unable to dissociate from his visual representation. Zaf's identity performances, which "reconstructed something that wasn't real from somethin that wis" (*P* 22), prove to be masks, instances of mimicry, which purport one or another 'exclusive' signifier of his self, but, added up, they form a complex, multiple, hybrid identity, which, in a way, he also performs during his shows through his hybrid language use, and during the final night, through his hybrid playlist of music. Identity performance as a mimicry involving repetition and masquerade may, then, also be interpreted as necessarily theatrical, positing and positioning diasporians as performers, consciously playing on and with their

projected identities, as Karim's and Puppy's figures also indicate. On the other hand, Karim's role-plays and performances suggests the possibility of the diasporic subject's mimicry as resistance, mocking and subverting dominant discourse through exaggerated stereotypes.

The fourth claim made in my dissertation derives directly from the third – I found that the various identity performances may lead to different identity positions and variations on diasporic identity: as immigrant or diasporian, Indian, Muslim or British Asian, a tourist or a traveller, to name but a few. As I asserted in Karim's case, identity performances may also be perceived as light-hearted games, playful try-outs of various subjectivities, and possible aspects of a fluid identity. Metaphorised by the metamorphosis of the immigrant and the transmutations of the South Asian diaspora subject, the various diasporic identities and identity positions, then, suggest hybrid and multiple identities in fluidity, and may manifest in individual choices of self-identification and belonging. My argument here is that belonging in movement signals the inability and unwillingness to be attached to place or to belong – in Gupta's novel the heroine's wanderlust and cosmopolitanism display a unique love-hate relationship with places, as well as temporary attachment as a possible way of a Cliffordian "dwelling-in-traveling." Dhaliwal's *Tourism* takes this notion one step further in his protagonist – the epitome of unattachment – and the figure of the tourist, who is "just looking" but never staying in one place for long enough to call it home. Puppy's example shows that movement may not only be an essential tool of resistance to stasis and fixity, but also a symptom of urban alienation and voluntary homelessness; for Shahid and Karim of *The Buddha*, on the other hand, movement seems to generate what Massey calls "a progressive sense of place," resulting in the perception of the metropolis as their "manor," as a nomadic territory marked out by routine paths and temporary abodes, as well as in the creation of a mobile subjectivity.

For me, one of the most thought-provoking aspects of mobile subjectivities is that there is a thin line between interpreting them as roles (forms of mimicry and identity performances) or as different identity positions, revealing actual traits of the diasporic subject's identity. Due to their decadent lifestyle in the metropolis, I read Shahid's, Karim's and Puppy's figure as pleasure trippers (a certain kind of tourists); yet, Puppy's self-identification as a tourist in the city suggests that his tourism is a mask to hide his otherness and to justify his detachment, as well as a state of mind testifying to a post-ethnic diasporic consciousness. In my view, Puppy's and Karim's identity performances in urban and

suburban space are not only part of a defensive and a Bhabhaian mimicry, but also point to the acknowledgement of a multiple self with shifting boundaries, a hybrid self in fluidity; a transgressive subjectivity both rejecting and playing upon racial and national stereotypes, and casting off dominant ideas on family, nation and home to engage in various forms of movement.

Based on their movement within and between urban and suburban space, I argued for the following mobile subjectivities as possible varieties of the characters' identity: tourists, *flâneurs*, travellers, cosmopolites and (female) nomads. Karim's figure in *The Buddha* is prone to different interpretations – he has been read as an embodiment of all the above mentioned subjectivities, due to his complex relationship with places and his different journeys: his local migration to the city, commuting between the suburb and the city, nomadic movement in Greater London, and his tourist trips to London and New York. My most emphatic argument here was that Karim is a nomad in a Deleuzian and Braidottian sense, following routine paths in his marked nomadic territory of London, transgressing established dominant discourses on sexuality and subjectivity. While Karim's and Shahid's first steps in London, as well as Chanu's late sight-seeing tour posit them as tourists, Puppy becomes a tourist during his weekend trip to the countryside and also through self-identification. On the other hand, strolling the streets of London, observing its inhabitants and urban architecture, and enjoying his anonymity in the crowd, which enables him to make the sarcastic and subjective remarks of the insider, yet remain detached and hidden, Puppy's figure also emerges as a postmodern *flâneur*, only to 'transform' into a 'real' tourist and a traveller, a so-called global nomad, at the end of the novel – subject positions also detectable in Shahid's figure at the end of *The Black Album* –, suggesting that these subjectivities may intertwine and intersect.

At the end of *Brick Lane*, discovering the pleasures and possibilities of the city, Nazneen also appears as a postmodern, post-postcolonial urban walker, a twenty-first century *flâneuse*, though I first and foremost consider her to be a Braidottian female nomad, who can change her subject positions and determine her own paths. Her nomadism is characterised by transgressing boundaries and subverting conventions, by resisting fixity and attachment, and by the ability to experience belonging as becoming. Similarly, the heroine of *The Glassblower's Breath* is characterised by defiance and transgression, and she inhabits the world as a home with no rules. Her female nomadic consciousness also intersects with a certain Cliffordian travelling identity – a fluid social identity, a cosmopolitanism manifested

in movement to and within transnational spaces, and pointing to the reconsideration of traditional ways of belonging and rigid conceptions of home. These interpretations, I argued, may enable a better understanding of the multiple identities and diasporic subjectivity of British Asian women, especially in light of my claim that in Gupta's and Ali's novels cosmopolitanism and nomadism appear as indisputable factors in transforming a double subaltern identity as an ethnic and gendered other into a multiple feminine subjectivity. This female agency would not be possible without the enabling, emancipatory city, providing a politics of location and an open space for a new gendered British subject.

All these aspects of diasporic subjectivity are present in *Psychoraag*, where the tropes of metamorphosis, fluidity and mobility are pushed to their metaphorical limit. In Saadi's text, it is music and the ether that serve as open spaces for the protagonist's identity construction and self-identification, and as metaphysical spaces of metamorphosis. What makes Saadi's novel so significant for the purposes of this dissertation is its unusual and complex approach to a never-ending identity formation and construction, portrayed through the protagonist's alchemical transformation, his immortal self, transcendental self and transcendental ego. These identity positions or elements of a multiple identity not only lend themselves to further research but also signal a post-ethnic turn both in British Asian fiction and in the perception of diasporic identity.

When Zaf points out that his job as a DJ is to "[t]urn life intae music ...Turn lead tae gold" (P201), or when he asserts that music "filled your world, it completed you. It replicated your soul and turned you to gold" (P 239), what we see is not simply images of transformation. Along with a reference to the show's final night as an "alchemical algorithm" (P 165), Zaf's words here point to the alchemist's endeavour to create gold out of base matter. The alchemical metaphor appears in the novel on two other occasions: in connection with the "metempsychosis" experienced by immigrants to Scotland, "transfiguring trade of skin alchemy" (P 177); and as a direct reference to Zaf, "a scientist, a master ae matter an energy, an alchemist ae the radio waruld" (P 368), who claims to be in a constant process of self transformation. This transformation is, I argue, directly linked to metamorphosis, the central metaphor of chapter 1, and to Rushdie's investigation of the "mutability of the essence of the self," the transformation of the immigrant's "essence" into "ever-varying forms" (*Satanic* 276). What the examples from *Psychoraag* imply is that Saadi uses the concept of alchemy not necessarily in the original meaning of turning lead into gold – as is the case of DJ-ing, positioning Zaf as an alchemist – but in a Jungian sense of the alchemist being transformed

into a different, superior substance during the alchemical process or, as Zaf's words imply, owing to music.

Studying medieval alchemy for decades, Jung wholeheartedly believed that the real value of alchemy lay in “demonstrating psychophysical methods of transforming consciousness” and that the alchemist's primary aim was “to extend life and deepen the capacities of the human mind” (Cavalli 49). In Thom Cavalli's view, the goal of the alchemist is “the creation of a Divine Self” (49), which Zaf describes as becoming “[i]neffable. God only wise” (*P* 337). Such a transformation, however, as I shall show in a minute, he only perceives to be possible through rebirth (echoing the refrain-like central idea from *The Satanic Verses*), which he experiences not in the traditional diasporic form of relocation or rerooting, but via a complex process of transfusion and transmutation, like Rushdie's protagonists. In *Psychoraag*, this process is speeded up and completed by Zaf's alleged sexual intercourse with Zilla (which ‘happens’ in his narcotic state), during which he feels

as though [he] wis no longer man or wumman but sumhin undefined – sumhin in between or doon below, a hindbrain ae a thing, a purely physical entity that would jist shudder an die an leave nae imprint ... Her hale boady wis formin a hide ower his, a skin that stopped him fae movin, sweatin, breathin, a darkness that engulfed him an turned his boady, his mind, his essence, intae music, intae a single, howlin note ae despair. (*P* 301-2)

Zaf's union with Zilla, sinister and illusory as it may seem, suggests the birth of a third entity that exists beyond gender and skin-colour, and is both heavily physical and purely spiritual. If Zaf's essence or ‘true self’ turns to music then this is a case of true alchemy, the realisation of the alchemist's ultimate goal – an ‘alchemical metempsychosis.’ Zaf and Zilla's union may be perceived as a *cuniunctio oppositorum*, the final stage of the alchemical process, which signals “the union of opposites in which separated materials with opposite qualities were at last united to create a wholly new united substance – the ultimate goal of alchemical procedures” (Hopcke 124).

What makes this alchemical transformation even more noteworthy is that a few pages later Zaf claims that “part ae him hud always been Zilla ... Ivirythin that wis inside ae him wis Zilla,” that is, as he becomes music, “[w]an note, carved in stone, firin aff tae the farthest corners ae the universe” (*P* 305), it is not a fixed singular self that becomes a spiritual

substance, a divine Self, but an always already fluid and multiple self. Thus, unlike Meena's desired rebirth, which would result in a "white English" identity, Zaf and Zilla's union recalls both the 'birth' of Rushdie's "Gibreelsaladin Farishtachamcha," a joint entity, a hybridity and multiplicity *par excellence*, and the jubilant acceptance of this hybridity and multiplicity, which is manifested in the implied divinity of the two notions. Furthermore, the fact that Zaf needs to die to be reborn as music evokes the first line of *The Satanic Verses*: "To be born again ... first you have to die" (1). In a similar vein, Zaf claims that "oan this nicht-tae-end-aw-nichts" (P 304) "he had died and wis now invisible," "larger than life" (P 337) – yet another reference to the divine self – and this rebirth is also metaphorised in the flash-forward scene at the end of the novel, where Zaf literally descends into Glasgow's underworld:

When he came round ... [he] stumbled through the tunnel ... and lay down in the flow, and he let the cold water wash over his body. He felt the blood and sweat and spunk of the night slip from his skin and he wis totally alone ... He ... waded through the water, feelin his way upstream ... He stumbled towards the light ... and he let himself be blinded by it and he let it fill him. (P 352)

The powerful depiction of Zaf emerging through the (birth-)tunnel to reach the light metaphorises his rebirth in the form of music, as a transformed being, which he simply puts as "Ahm back an Ah'm no the same" (P 368). In addition, the tunnel may be interpreted as the spatial metaphor of the ether as well, which is the primary location of Zaf's immortal self, the ultimate space where he hopes his voice will be circling for good.

The difference this new self entails suggests an extension and an extreme exaggeration of the metaphors of transformation, fluidity and belonging that dominate the diasporic novels analysed in the present dissertation. To see the difference, it is sufficient to quote Zaf's description of his sense of being on the air:

He leaned forward so that his lips almost touched the metal of the mike. He felt the edges of his skin begin to tingle – not from electricity but from expectation. He could taste his own breath as it returned, cold and metallic, from the black mesh. It was like the first kiss of a new lover, only better. Once the breath had left his lips, it wis no longer his alone but belonged to the whole world. On the radio, he wis immortal. Invisible, formless, perfect. (P 85)

This formless and invisible existence points to Aristotle's theory of the ether as the sphere of "the divinely changeless" and of the soul consisting of ether, which may explain its perpetual movement (Merlan 40), and it also evokes the Platonic concept of the immortal soul, "an entity whose kinship to eternal, changeless beings occur alongside its capacity to undergo radical and ceaseless transformation" (Brill 2-3). According to Sara Brill, Plato's soul is a "uniquely plastic entity" since it is "subject to a wide variety of transformations with respect to its condition – it can be unified or divided, simple or multiform and complex – and *unique* because of its exemplary capacity to sustain itself as an entity through radical forms of fragmentation" (3) [original emphasis]. Through music and the rebirth it generates, Zaf in a way divorces himself from the physical world and becomes the metonymy of an immaterial, spiritual substance in the state of perpetual transformation and transfusion, yet at the same time perfect and immortal, a 'new and improved' diasporian *without* a diasporic consciousness.

Zaf's immortal self may also be approached through the image of the purgatory, which Saadi uses to describe Pakistani-Muslim diasporic existence (*P* 134) and which has different connotations in the Islamic religion than its Christian counterpart. In Islamic theology, the purgatory is called *Burzakh* or *Barzakh* and it refers to "the interval period between Death and Resurrection" (Reza 298). Zaf uses the Urdu word *Burzakh* three times: when referring to his identity crisis (*P* 135), in connection with black magic practiced in Pakistan and Glasgow (*P* 213), and, perhaps most interestingly, he makes a link between music and the purgatory when he recalls how, "[u]p by Dunnet Head, the seas heaved with whales and selkies and the sky reddened toward the music of *Burzakh*. The songs of Purgatory" (*P* 211). For the average Western/British reader of the novel, the term purgatory, even when the Urdu translation is provided, refers to a place of waiting and purification (a "grey zone" between hell and Paradise in Dante and a link to the alchemical process), and when Zaf bitterly claims that "[e]verything was a compromise" and that "[i]t was in the nature of our being never to be wholly happy, always to sense insecurity or worse" (*P* 211), it is this image and sense of the word that first comes to their mind and which they may then link to immigrant experience. However, for those familiar with Islam, *Burzakh* has completely different connotations.

According to Muslims, everybody, except for the martyrs, goes through a type a purgatory after death, and is resurrected on Judgement Day, when they are eventually judged based on their deeds on earth (Reza 59). The purgatory (also known by the names of

Hurqalya or *Huvarqalya*) is an intermediary world between the physical and the spiritual one, and “[e]very human being in the physical world has two bodies, one in physical shape and the other in the Hurqalya” (Reza 203-4). The Islamic purgatory is (similarly to its Christian equivalent) a place of waiting, and, since *Burzakh* literally means “a veil or a barrier that stands between two things and which does not allow the two to meet” (“Barzakh”), or an “‘obstruction’ between two things or places” and a “point of transition where entities similar yet different come together” (Glassé 78), it may also be perceived as a border zone, where in-betweenness takes a unique shape.¹⁷⁷ From this aspect, Zaf’s claim that purgatory “was right down inside of your skin” (*P* 134) directly links the in-betweenness of the diaspora subject to that of the Christian *and* the Islamic doctrine of the purgatory. On the other hand, *Burzakh*, as the place “halfway between reward and punishment” is “the realm of abstracts or of incorporeal beings” where “one does not experience physical pains,” and where bodies become “facsimile bodies” (“Barzakh”), which is explained the following way:

This is to say that they will appear quite like our worldly material bodies but, factually, they will not be this body (containing skin and flesh). It will be an elegant, fine and exquisite body. It will be finer than air. There will be no barriers for it, which our bodies face in this material world. It (the Barzakh body) can see anything and everything from everywhere every time. (“Barzakh”)

What makes this approach to existence in the purgatory so intriguing is its emphasis on a certain ‘spiritual corporeality,’ which is perfect, borderless and, in a way, omniscient – a form of being that resonates with Zaf’s image of his ideal self, which is perfect, invisible, formless, and immortal. Although admittedly an unbeliever, Zaf appears to have internalised the Islamic notion of the facsimile self and, whether consciously or unconsciously, he hopes to transform into such a self through music. It is probably not by chance, then, that, back from the nightmares of his drug-induced hallucinations, in the morning light, Zaf “felt that his body wis an instrument, his life a certain music ... And when you have reached that point at which you are lighter than light, at that moment, you can gaze at your Creator and be one with... whatever-it-is!” (*P* 366) The feeling of unity and at the same time of being different,

¹⁷⁷ From this aspect, it may be interesting to refer back to the treatment of diaspora space in *Maps for Lost Lovers* (chapter 1) – if we interpret diaspora space as a border zone, then it (and the feeling of in-betweenness it entails) is always already a kind of purgatory for the immigrant, the spatial manifestation of the purgatory Meena of *Anita and Me* and Zaf experience ‘in their skin.’

transformed, recalls both the physical sensation of being on the air and a concomitant spirituality, which eventually suggests the birth of an extra-worldly, transcendent self.

Zaf's transcendental self may also be approached from a philosophical aspect, from Edmund Husserl's phenomenological concept of the *transcendental ego* (136), a non-empirical sense of self. In Charles Harvey's words, the transcendental ego is "the multifaceted living point of interaction between society, culture, history, and the present world," which is characterised by "the self-conscious recognition that each of us is an intentional web of inherited meanings that actively transforms those meanings in the very process of transmitting them" (55). Husserl's transcendental sense of self means that one experiences oneself as

both a passive inheritor of a previously existing world, and an active point of transmission and transformation of that world. The sense of oneself as transcendental is the sense of oneself as a new channel for the intentional re-formation of the meanings, values, and beliefs that the world has given to one. Partnered with this sense is the sense that one will now, inevitably, meld these meanings, values, and beliefs in new ways with that world. (C. Harvey 54)

Based on Husserl's concept, Zaf's transcendental self may be read as a fantastic, impossible utopian summation of all the identity types in the British Asian novels discussed here: the metonymy of an identity in the process of perpetual (trans-)formation and re-construction, encompassing and reformulating the cultural roots of his parents, his diasporic experience and identity crisis, as well as his own perception and sense of the world – figuratively speaking, a melting pot of all human knowledge and experience that finds its outlet and means of expression in music and language, and which results in a uniquely new way of interpreting the self and the world it inhabits. Zaf's transcendent self is a complex sense of self but by no means a divine self, since through the novel Zaf remains decidedly human, with all its bodily sensations, faults, desires and attachments.

When Zaf poses the rhetorical question: "Whit happens tae a particular wavelength after a radio station hus stopped usin it? Where dae aw the wurds go? ... Does it jis fade away or ... take oan a life ae its ane...?" (P 378), his words suggest that his transcendent self will cease to exist when the music stops. While "timeless" music (P194), the "sounds from the furthest places" (P 193) take him on mental journeys, from Karachi to Glasgow, as the music

fades away, the show and the madness end, which is marked by Zaf's return from polyglotism to standard English, from a transcendental existence to a corporeality embodied in physical movement. The flash-forward scenes, however, mingle with his hallucinations and thus create the puzzling sensation of in-betweenness and duality yet again: "Ah am...here, in the cubicle ... And, yet, at the same time, Ah'm roamin aroon the streets ae this magnificent city" (P 377-78), Zaf claims. For me, his words recall the image of *Burzakh* and the facsimile self, both present and absent, seeing and knowing all. Drawing on this interpretation, when we see Zaf in the flash-forward scene, on his way back to the Shields, to "the place of his beginning" and "[t]he end of himself" (P 365), his journey may not necessarily be read as the diasporian's return to his roots, but, especially if we take the tunnel scene and Zaf's metaphorical rebirth into account, more as the transcendental self's transfusion and transformation of the world as he knew it.

The interconnectedness and fusion of old and new, world and self is also metaphorised in Zaf's alter egos: his physical journey in the city is told parallel with his mental journey in music/on the radio, which gradually reveals more and more components of his identity. In his drugged hallucinations and music-induced madness, Zaf's figure often merges with that of a Pakistani boy on a faded photograph, "the brother he'd never had" (P 197), who embodies Zaf's roots in Pakistan; Zafar, the gangster of Kinnin Park, who is Zaf's diasporic 'dark' self; and Zilla, his feminine side: "Sometimes Zaf had tried to elide himself into the mind and body of a woman¹⁷⁸ – to view men the way he felt a woman might ... But the woman he became wis always Zilla. She wis like a fuckin alter ego" (P 47). Sometimes these identities merge into one, forming a mutant self, e.g. "Zaf-Zafar, the double-headed, mortal deity" (P 400), while other times they are joined by additional figures of identification, such as the father and his first-born son, Qaisar, whom he abandoned when migrating to Scotland. Zaf's tangled, at times unwelcome, self-images and alter egos are metonymies of his metempsychosis, and unalienable parts of his multiple selves and his "psychoraag," which are all manifested in music; as Zaf asserts: "You were like a *mela*,¹⁷⁹ inseparable from the *raag*" (P 365).

It is through the alter egos that Saadi's novel presents an inflection and fantastic extension on the movements and routes discussed in the previous chapters: the alter egos may also mark the various routes and stops of Zaf's journey, while his oblique yet bounded

¹⁷⁸ Zaf's wish to discover his feminine side evokes the scene in *The Black Album*, where Shahid feels liberated when masqueraded as a woman (117-8).

¹⁷⁹ A Carnatic South Indian classical music, a mode; a fête.

trajectories in the city – attempts to “run without runnin away” (P 143) – become a metaphor of his identity, informed by movement and a fluidity within boundaries. Although both the amalgamation of the different selves/alter egos and the transformations that Zaf’s journey entails may justify the interpretation of his self as a transcendental ego, his identity, eventually, cannot remain transcendental. The reason for this may lie in the fact that Zaf’s movement (either in the cubicle or in the city) creates a horizontal line dividing above and below, spirituality and corporeality, the soul and the body. By leaving the sphere of the physical world for the ether, Zaf can leave the sphere of (racial, ethnic, regional etc.) difference behind to become a voice without a body, pure, perfect and transcendental. Yet, since one’s voice is always already based in physicality and is thus necessarily marked by one’s cultural identity (a phenomenon that Zaf consciously plays upon with his language use), Zaf’s voice cannot become the transcendence of the physical sphere – it may be “conjoinin wi the magical, geometric dance ae the spheres” (P 402) for the duration of the show, but cannot maintain the transcendence of the self for good. Therefore, it is perhaps more expedient to Zaf’s transcendent self as one strand of his multiple identities, one stage in his process of identity formation and construction.

To return to the starting point and my initial claim concerning identity in *Psychoraag*, Zaf’s identity formation, which takes place in the primary loci of the time-space compression of the cubicle and *The Junnune Show*, resonates with the four stages of alchemy that Jung used to describe the process of individuation: “*nigredo*, for the dark night of the soul, when an individual confronts the shadow within; *separatio*, for the moment of emotional and spiritual discrimination; *mortificatio* or *putrfectio*, for the stage at which the old neurotic ways of being are cast off; *dissolutio*, for the initial disorientation after the old self is discarded” (Hopcke 163). In my reading, these alchemical stages stand for Zaf’s identity crisis, uprooting and multiple self-positioning, his transcendent self, and, after the show and his psychoraag come to an end, his first hesitant and somewhat directionless steps towards owning up to his hybrid, regional identity.

The stages of the process of individuation may also be interpreted as essential stops along the continuum of metempsychosis: the transition and transformation, transubstantiation and metamorphosis of the diasporian, the British-Asian diaspora and contemporary Britain – yet another metaphor of the diasporic experience and the metonymy of the transfusion of the self, an unmissable and indisputable aspect of diasporic identity. Although the handful of

novels I analysed in my dissertation obviously cannot provide an exhaustive picture of diasporic subjectivity and experience, my findings call attention to the diversity of identity formation and (re-)construction across a range of cultural spaces and geographical locations in Britain. By looking at different forms of movement and metamorphosis, I have highlighted the numerous types and possible interpretations of the interrelatedness of space, movement and identity, also suggesting perspectives for further interdisciplinary research on British Asian diaspora literature, a platform of which may be Zaf's regional identity and transcendent self (shedding the confining categories of race, culture and ethnicity): not only do they signal a post-ethnic turn in diaspora fiction but they also call for a change in the (self-)perception of the once black British, now British Asians and – maybe some time in the future – ‘simply’ British.

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